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Mystery Magazine

THE STAR OF STARZ	Philip MacDonald	6
CAPTAIN LEOPOLD SWINGS A BAT	Edward D. Hoch	19
VENGEANCE	Robert Twohy	35
POLICEMAN'S LOT	William Bankier	45
THE WESTCOMBE WITCH	Lillian de la Torre	54
SKYJACK	Josh Pachter	67
"WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING ALL DAY?"	Kelly H. Blau	76
VENDETTA	Junius T. Podrug	83
HOMAGE TO JOHN KEATS	Henry T. Parry	92
MALICE AT THE MIKE	Jon L. Breen	100
THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME	Robert Edward Eckels	110
OF SUSPICIOUS ORIGIN	Michael Gilbert	118
WOMAN TROUBLE	Florence V. Mayberry	127
DO YOU FOLLOW ME?	Gerald Kersh	142
JERICHO AND THE MISSING BOY	Hugh Pentecost	146
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	90

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a *NEW* short story by

PHILIP MacDONALD

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Actually, the story was written over a decade ago. The first draft was finished late in 1961, and the final revision made in 1962. It was then sent to EQMM — in 1962 while President John F. Kennedy was still alive — and frankly we were scared to publish it. Now, with the passage of time, we've decided that the story should not be lost. . .

THE STAR OF STARZ

by PHILIP MacDONALD

This story will be difficult to write, but I'm going to take a stab at it. It's about an extraordinary affair I was accidentally mixed up in, and it's difficult to write because the other people concerned held exalted positions, to say the least. So exalted that I won't be able to name names, or give specific dates, or even tell where it happened.

So I'll begin by saying the scene was the private summer residence of a certain Ambassador to a certain island country, and the time was early in the second half of this century, on the first day of a small and I mean select weekend party.

The Incident (I have to give it a capital) involved twelve people, and eleven of them were personages—VIPs. But the twelfth was the merest person, so mere, so obscure, that his name doesn't even have to be changed.

I'm referring to myself, Bradley Webbster; not even a middle initial. I was a week past my twenty-sixth birthday, a fellow

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countryman of the Ambassador, his wife, and a couple of the guests. And I'd never conceivably have met any of them if I hadn't happened to be doing postgraduate work (biochemistry) at the famous island university where the Ambassador's son (let's call him Victor) was in his third year.

He belonged to one of those blue-book, man-about-town cliques they still have there, and we only knew each other at all because we both belonged to the university chess club and both played first-string tennis. So I was surprised when he phoned me that Friday morning, and more surprised still when I found out what he wanted. It seemed he was in the hospital (quarantined with chicken pox, of all things) and wanted me to pinch hit at a weekend party of his mother's.

He gave me quite a snow job: the family couldn't find anyone else at such short notice; the party wouldn't be any fire dance, but I'd get some pretty fair tennis and maybe some chess; my opposite number was a lot of fun; the other guests were just some visiting firemen from home; and it was a nice drive to his father's place on the river, and of course I must use his car.

It was the car that really sold me; the party seemed innocuous enough, probably some millionaires and a couple of politicians. Of course, if I'd asked more questions I might have spotted the real reason he'd picked on me. It had three prongs to it; the first and second (tennis and chess) he'd actually mentioned. But the third, which he'd carefully avoided, was the fact that I'd recently been double security-checked because of my work.

By noon I was on my way, driving blithely along where no angel in his right mind would ever dream of treading. Having lunched on the way, I arrived at the Ambassador's house by 2:30. I'd have been ten minutes earlier except for a car which slowed me down on the last leg of the trip, a narrow country road. It was a middle-aged, low-priced sedan, sadly in need of a wash, and undistinguished was the word for it. So I was surprised to see it turn in through the wrought-iron gates I was heading for myself.

The house was one of those historic-looking jobs they have all over the island country. There were wooded grounds around it, and gardens full of flowers, and an enormous stretch of emerald-colored lawn which sloped down to a backwater of the river. And there were walks of clipped yew and terraces with peacocks.

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And eventually a flight of steps where the sedan came to a stop.

As I stopped the convertible at a decent interval behind it, I saw the front door of the house swing open and a man and woman come out, obviously Victor's mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Ambassador. At the same time three people climbed out of the sedan: a gray-haired man in tweeds, one of those island country matrons, and a girl with a slim backview.

They started up the steps, and I untangled my six-foot-three from the convertible and tagged uncomfortably along behind them. In welcoming attitudes Mr. and Mrs. Ambassador waited at the top. There was more than a dash of deference about them, and it puzzled me, until the man in tweeds happened to glance around and I found myself looking at the island country's Prime Minister.

I gaped at his back. Whatever I'd been expecting, it certainly hadn't included rubbing social shoulders with one of the world's leading statesmen.

By the time I'd looked back at the old sedan—I just couldn't figure it!—the other three had reached the top and greetings were in full blast.

Then it was my turn, and things began to get really embarrassing. Talking fast and making little jokes about chicken pox, Mrs. A. was all over me. Using an outsize trowel, she plastered me with thanks for taking Victor's place, and then outdid herself by describing me as "a *most* brilliant young man!"

And Mr. A., who said nothing at all, didn't make me feel any better. His overfirm handshake and baker-type smile couldn't cover up the dubious look in his eyes.

Altogether, it was a pretty unhappy scion of the Webbsters who presently found himself alone upstairs, pacing a paneled bedroom the size of a three-car garage. I was looking into the immediate future and finding it well on the bleak side. With or without a Prime Minister, it was looming a little too rich for the simple Webbster blood.

But there wasn't anything I could do about it, so I washed my hands and ran a comb through my thatch and took myself downstairs, toying with thoughts of revenge on Victor. On my way I didn't see, or hear, any sign of life; and I was thinking I might go out in the sun and maybe talk to a peacock when I discovered I wasn't alone after all. In the hall, near the fireplace, a girl was lurking in the depths of a wing chair. She looked up at me and said, "Hullo," with a "u," the way her people do. And she smiled.

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I replied, "Hi," with warmth if not brilliance. I knew she must be the Prime Minister's daughter, but during the introductions she'd been in dark glasses and I'd been in a sweat, so I wasn't prepared for the effect she had on me now.

It was quite an effect, and by the time she'd suggested showing me around and we were outside, strolling along the upper terrace, it had taken a lot of the edge off my fears of the weekend. And when she happened to remark, for no particular reason, that this party promised to be "even stickier than most of these ghastly get-togethers," I didn't even latch onto this fine opportunity to discover exactly what sort of party it was.

I said, "Oh, I don't know—" and was starting a nice line when she suddenly grabbed my arm. "Oh, oh!" she said. "Let's get out of the way," and she pulled me indoors, through the open French windows of a big L-shaped room with a billiard table in it.

She stayed by the windows, looking out. So I looked, too. I saw a rose garden, a tennis court, and a boathouse on the backwater, with a motorboat nosing up to it. The boat was another undistinguished-looking job, and I suppose I should have thought of the sedan. But somehow I didn't; maybe because all I could see on deck were two undistinguished-looking men and some fishing tackle. I didn't even get it when I saw the Ambassador and the Prime Minister hurrying along a path toward the landing stage.

Beside me, the girl said, "Lights!" And then she said, "Camera! Action! Sound of trumpets off!"

I said, "Huh?" and stared at her; and she began to hum the only national anthem that really sounds like one.

So once more I looked out; and now I saw the P.M. and Mr. A. greeting a man and woman who must have been crowded out of sight in the boat's little cabin. And I caught myself gaping again.

Because here was another of the world's top statesmen. The leader of the island country's neighbor. The Tall General himself. In person!

The four of them started toward the house, managing to look like a procession. I suppose I was still gaping, because I heard the girl say, "What's the matter?" and found her looking at me curiously. "Don't tell me you didn't know who was coming," she said. "You must have!"

"Oh, sure," I said quickly. Too quickly, because now I was trapped. I had to show a reason

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for being so dumbfounded.

But there was a good one right there, and I grabbed it. "It's the way they're getting here," I said. "Your father in that jalopy. And now *him*—" I used the Tall General's name—"sulking in the bilge of a beat-up launch. You must admit it's pretty wildsville."

"It insures privacy, doesn't it?" She blazed at me. "Or do you want the whole world steamed up? Notes from all nations—questions in Parliament—newsmen and security people all over the place!" She calmed down, and laughed. "Television cables in the bathroom. Flash bulbs in the soup. Policemen under the bed. You ought to try that for what you call wildsville!"

"I guess you're right," I said slowly. "I hadn't thought. . ." I was beginning to worry again; the 48-hour future was looking bleaker and more ominous than ever.

But it didn't take her long to make me forget it. As soon as the coast was clear she dragged me outside and we went on with our grand tour of the property, which had once belonged to some king or queen or other.

We'd reached a first-name basis (I'll give hers here as Pamela) before my worries came back, in spades this time. We were walking up a sloping path at the back of the house, and she looked over the low wall at what was still called the stable yard and suddenly stopped. She laughed; and then pointed. "Here's some more wildsville for you!" she said.

All I could see was a delivery truck pulling into the service entry of a country house. Sure it was undistinguished-looking; but it was just a truck, and on the panels it said, BLEDSOE'S LAUNDRY.

But then Mr. and Mrs. A. came popping out from some side door like figures on a Swiss weather clock. They went into their welcoming attitudes again, and waited while the truck backed up to them with its undistinguished-looking rear end. Two men in coveralls jumped out of the cab, then let down the tailgate, with another man helping them from inside; a man in a dark business suit.

The tail converted into a ramp, and when they'd fixed it up, the three men sort of melted away. And I was left looking into the damnedest truck-interior anyone could ever hope to see. The inside of the panels was covered with a cheerful wallpaper. There was a carpet on the floor. Near the gate was an easy chair; and in the middle, flanked by two more chairs and lighted by a

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shaded lamp, was a table with cards and a couple of scorepads on it.

The 20-20 Webbster vision absorbed all this at a gulp, then focused on the man and woman who got up from the table and crossed to the ramp and casually walked down it.

By this time I should have been prepared to see my own country's two first citizens. But somehow I wasn't; so there I stood, frozen, staring at the man I'd never regretted voting for.

Pamela nudged my arm. "Feel more at home now?"

"Oh, sure," I said. "Sure." But then I looked at her; and suddenly I felt like telling her the truth. "Tell you what I *do* feel," I said. "I don't think any of this is happening. I've got to be dreaming!"

I went on feeling like that for about forty-five minutes, but then I snapped out of it. I had to; because I was on the tennis court, warming up for a set of mixed doubles, and there was no doubt about it; my partner (Bradley Webbster's partner!) was the wife of my President, and we were playing against the President himself and a girl who was the daughter of our main ally's Prime Minister.

It was a better game than you'd think; they all played over-average club tennis, with my partner a shade the weakest. But I worked like a dog and managed to scrape a narrow win for us in both sets. My partner (she was grand) seemed awfully pleased; and the President said he hadn't enjoyed a game so much in a long time.

So I was feeling pretty good when I left the court. Quite different. So different that while I bathed and changed I realized I didn't want to wring Victor's neck any more; I wanted to give him a medal instead. I even quit worrying about my dinner jacket betraying its non-Webbsterian origins. Because now all I felt about this party was a sense of privilege at being in on it, plus enough curiosity to kill a dozen cats.

And I hadn't been downstairs five minutes when I got more curious than ever. Because two new arrivals (let's call them the Princess and the Young Pundit) came with the cocktails. They were dinner guests; but they were also dynamite. Their recent engagement had thrown a king-sized wrench into the whole international-policy works, and their marriage would mean a new Eastern alliance that none of the diplomacy boys, or anyone else for that matter, had ever even dreamed of. An alliance that would have to make up its

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mind, and quick too, which side of the ideological fence it was going to come down on.

"Exotic" is an understatement for the note the two of them struck in these surroundings. This was partly because of their color, of course, but mainly because of their clothes. The Young Pundit's odd-type pants and knee-length coat, which looked all right in news pictures and on TV, seemed really wild in a drawing room. And although the Princess's gown was occidental enough, she'd certainly gone all oriental with the jewelry. With diamonds all over her she looked like some vizier's favorite out of the Arabian Nights—just as beautiful and just as out of place.

I stared at her across the room; every time she moved the diamonds winked at me and I was just wondering how much she was worth as she stood when I heard an astonished whisper from Pamela beside me, "For heaven's sake, *she's got It on!*"

I couldn't think what It could be among so much, and didn't get a chance to ask. But when it was my turn to be presented, I saw. It hit me in the eye, luckily only in a figurative way. It was a diamond, all right, but what a diamond! It must have weighed all of forty-five carats, and was cut like a six-pointed star. It was rose-colored, and the refractions from it looked like flames. It hung on an almost invisible platinum chain, about six inches below a five-strand choker of more ordinary stones, and it sort of nestled, just at the beginning of the royal cleavage.

For some reason it had a strange effect on me. Normally, I'm not interested in precious stones, particularly diamonds, but somehow I couldn't get this one out of my mind. I told Pamela about it a few minutes later, when we'd found a window seat to ourselves. "Funny," I said, "I don't know anything about the thing, and couldn't care less. But somehow it's giving me the damnedest *uncomfortable* sensation."

She seemed interested. "P'raps you're psychic," she said, and proceeded to give me a history of the thing. Including its name, which here I can only give as the Star of Starz.

It was one of those jungle-and-conquest sagas, full of temples and treachery, blood and concubines. Pamela did a good job on it, and I admit I was fascinated. But it didn't give me any clue to the nagging in my mind, the nagging which was beginning to feel like one of those slipping memory cogs.

It wasn't till the middle of

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dinner that the cog jumped into place, and I almost choked trying not to laugh. I looked at Pamela next to me and said, "It's okay. I just found out what's bugging me, that's all."

She was curious. "About the Star, you mean? Tell me." She was pitching her voice under the general clatter of table talk.

"Oh, it's not so much." I matched my tone to hers. "Just that all this"—I looked round the table—"it's all been done before. It's old hat. I've read it a dozen times, and so have you. So has everybody!"

"What in the world are you talking about?" She stared at me.

"Think a minute." I grinned. "The dinner party—the visiting potentates—the lady with the jewel of jewels, the rock to end all rocks." I was enjoying myself. "Remember now? Halfway through dinner everyone starts talking about the thing. So what does the lady do?"

She said, "*Oh!*" Light was dawning.

"Exactly. She takes it off—"

"—and it's passed round from hand to hand—and they all examine it—"

"That's right. And after x minutes, when she's talking to someone about something else, she suddenly looks around and says may I have my rock back, please—"

"—and it's *gone!*"

Pamela was laughing, but she gave a little shudder, and she couldn't help glancing at the Princess across the table. She said, "What a perfectly awful thought! It terrifies me even to think it!"

"So relax." I gave her a final grin. "It can't happen here, as the fella said." At the other end of the table people started laughing, and I saw the President sitting back, looking happily poker-faced.

"I wish we'd heard that," Pamela said. "He can be awfully amusing sometimes."

"I can imagine," I said; and then, as I looked at the President again, I remembered something. "What's his chess game like?" I asked. "You happen to know?"

"Oh, oh!" She laughed. "Has he booked you already?"

"Nothing definite." I was remembering what he'd said when we left the tennis court. "But he did mention playing tomorrow—"

I stopped, because Pamela had suddenly stiffened in her chair as she looked across the table. She whispered, "Oh, *no!*" and when I looked where she was looking, I saw the Princess with her hands up to her neck—

And less than a minute later she was actually handing the Star of Starz to her dinner

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partner, the Prime Minister. While he was examining it, fascinated, Madame General leaned in from his other side, gabbling exclamations in her own language. And everybody else stopped talking, all of them focusing on the jewel.

The Princess looked around, smiling. She was really stunning, with that white smile against that copper skin. She said, "Please!" in the same syllable-clipping way the Young Pundit talked. "When Mistah Prime Ministah has fin-ished, will anee-one who wishes take the Star to ex-amine. I would be most happee."

And so, apparently, was everyone else—except me and my partner. I caught myself muttering, "Oh, brother!" and Pamela said, "I hate you! Bringing up that story!"

We knew it was all nonsense, of course, but I'll guarantee neither of us took an eye off the fabulous stone while it made its way around the table, flashing those rose-colored flames with every movement anyone gave it. It was a lovely, unbelievable thing; but I wished it would be lovely and unbelievable somewhere else.

It came to us on Pamela's side. We looked at it together, and I passed it on in the shortest possible time compatible with civility.

Then we went on watching—we couldn't help it—until the Princess fastened the platinum chain around her neck again, and the Star of Starz was back where it belonged.

We relaxed then, and traded smiles. "That's a new ending, isn't it?" Pamela said. "I never thought I'd be so happy to see an anticlimax!"

I laughed. It was a pretty good curtain line, and I told her so. We began to talk about something else, and I put the Star out of my mind. I didn't imagine—why should I?—that it would ever cause me another second's worth of concern.

Which only goes to show! Because I was due for a shock. None of your run-of-the-mill little upsets, but a seismic, shattering, cataclysmic *shock!*

It came about 11:30, in the big L-shaped room where Pamela had dragged me to duck the Tall General's arrival.

With that sort of calculated informality which seemed to be the keynote, everybody had gathered in here to say goodbye to the dinner guests. We were all in the larger part of the room until the Princess started looking for her cloak, which she'd put down somewhere after a stroll in the gardens.

One of the men found it for her, on a chair by the billiard table; and as this was in the

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short arm of the L, they were both out of everybody's line of sight as she went toward him and thanked him.

I was standing pretty close, and something—maybe somebody up there hates me!—made me drop my cigarette lighter. It slid several feet across the carpet, finally stopping right next to the corner of the L. Considerably irked—I was talking to Pamela's mother and trying to be impressive—I went after it. And as I bent to pick it up, I heard the man's voice: "Oh, I'm so sorry!...Your hair—caught in my cuff link—"

With the lighter in my fingers I lifted my head—and found myself looking straight at the Princess and the man, who had just put the cloak around her shoulders. Their backs were to me, and he was holding his right hand awkwardly high, close to the back of the Princess's head, which was turned toward it.

I saw it all, every lightning movement of it—the fingers of the man's right hand moving very, very slightly as they tweaked at the royal hair in a classic piece of misdirection; the man's left hand, a glint of metal in it, flashing a series of movements out of the royal line of sight; first to the left side of the royal throat, then to the level of the royal ribcage, finally to the handkerchief pocket of the dinner jacket.

It was so fast, so neat, that I might not have known what was going on if the Star hadn't given one last fiery flash as it dropped into the man's pocket, its chain following like a comet's tail.

Somehow—I'll never quite know how—I managed to straighten myself and move back, a fraction of a second before the Princess turned and came out into general view, her cloak drawn around her. The man was beside her, and she was laughing at something he was saying.

People are always writing about minds "reeling," but I'd never understood what they meant before. I did now—because this smooth, slick, prestidigitor of a Raffles was the President! The man I'd never regretted voting for!

If I was paid, I couldn't give any coherent account of what went on for the next half hour or so. In my head, Bradley Webbster was wrestling with Bradley Webbster, and getting nowhere slowly. All that either of me knew was that the Princess had left, without realizing she was minus one forty-five-carat national heirloom. Every minute carried her another mile or so away; and while this took a lot of heat off

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the thief, it was having the reverse effect on the only eyewitness.

I found myself on one of the lower terraces, pacing about. I was on a sort of mental treadmill, thinking that all I *could* do was wonder what I *should* do. What I needed, desperately, was someone to talk to. But the obvious person was the last one I could even approach. Whatever I thought of her personally, it didn't change the fact that she was the daughter of another country's Prime Minister.

So what I needed was a compatriot, and a sympathetic one. The Ambassador was out to start with, and Mrs. A. wasn't any better—

I'd got that far when my mind began to function again, and a new thought came. Why talk at all, to anyone? Wouldn't it be best to do nothing? To say nothing, to think nothing? In short, to keep my lowly nose well out of the whole affair?

The answer was a resounding *Yes*, and I began to feel better—so much better that I started up the steps toward the house.

I was almost at the top when a new thought stopped me cold. Suppose some mental aberration had been behind the theft? Suppose there was a well-hidden family history of kleptomania? Suppose, in fact, that at the time of the theft, the thief hadn't been responsible for his actions?

I don't know how long I stood there, wrestling with Bradley Webbster again. This time we didn't have any problem to solve, we just had to stop me from chickening out. Because although I knew I did have to talk after all, and who it was I had to talk to, believe me the assignment was a little on the rugged side.

I found him in the hall, standing by the fireplace, talking to the Ambassador. From what I could hear, it seemed to be about some political mix-up at home, and it was obvious they wouldn't have much use for an interruption.

There was a lot of jelly in my legs, but I went right up to both men, with a smile that must have looked like a death rictus. And my voice came out a couple of semitones high, "Excuse me for butting in, Mr. President," I said. "But how about that game of chess?"

The Ambassador went dark red in the face, and you could have lighted a cigarette on the look he gave me. But before he could speak, the President said, "Oh, I think not tonight," and gave me a polite smile. "Tomorrow for sure, though."

I could feel clammy sweat

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on my forehead, but I couldn't quit now. "No time like the present, sir," I said. I couldn't keep my eyes from flickering a glance at his handkerchief pocket.

The Ambassador's face wasn't red any more, it was a sort of livid puce. He was so mad that when he tried to speak all that came out was a little hissing noise. But the President looked at me. "Maybe you have something there," he said slowly.

And then he said to the Ambassador, "Let's get together in the morning," and put a hand on my arm and steered me across the hall and along a passage. He opened a door, and we were in a sort of study-type room, very comfortable, with a chess table set up in one of the window alcoves. He'd been chatting all the way, but I hadn't heard a word of it.

He was still at it as we went across to the chess table, and so I had to plunge. I said, "Sir!" but it came out in a high thin squeak, and he didn't seem to hear. He'd picked up a knight from the board and was looking at it. He said, "Nice carving," and held it out for me to see—

But it wasn't in his hand any more. It had gone.

I blinked, and he smiled apologetically, opening his other hand to reveal the thing. "Childish hobby of mine," he said, and dropped into one of the chairs at the table.

I took the other chair, and tried again. I said, "Sir—" this time in a booming bass. But again it didn't take.

"I've been wondering," he said with a friendly smile, "just what sort of impression this little gathering has made on an intelligent, highly educated young man like you." He laughed. "Depressing, I imagine. And disillusioning to discover the world's being run by a collection of stuffed shirts and oddballs."

"Sir!" I was getting really desperate. "There's something I have to ask—"

"Plenty, I should think." The President chuckled. "Actually, you know, these off-the-record meetings were started by my predecessor. He was a great advocate of something he called 'human contact.' I suppose he believed it's easier to do business with a man when you know him personally."

"*Sir!*" I found myself on my feet; they were getting colder by the minute, and it was now or never.

"Sir," I said again. "I know what's in your pocket!" I pointed to it. "And I know how it got there!"

The President sighed. "I was afraid of that," he said. He

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looked up at me. "You poor chap, what a terrible spot to be in!"

"Yes, sir." I was way off balance. "But—but—"

"This is very difficult, isn't it?" He sighed again. "Would it help if I reminded you that neither I nor my family is noticeably short of money? Or told you that my wife abhors the ostentatious, particularly in jewelry?" He smiled. "Or assured you I have no tendency, latent or otherwise, toward kleptomania?"

I gulped. "I—I don't know, sir. I—"

He studied me. "No help, huh?" He was silent for a moment; then he said suddenly, "Look, my friend: besides myself, you are the only person—repeat *only*—who knows what happened. Could you do me a personal favor?"

I was really sweating now. "If you mean could I forget all about it—how could I, sir? I keep thinking what's going to happen when she finds it's gone! Surely all hell's going to break loose!"

"No doubt about that." He shrugged. "In fact, looking at the immediate future, it's quite an understatement." He kept his eyes squarely on mine. "However, the end results of my little plan should be very different. You see—" He stopped, shaking his head. "No, you don't see." He pushed back his chair and stood up. "So there's only one thing to do—"

"Wh-what's that, sir?" I must have stepped back, because my chair took me behind the knees and I sat down, hard.

"Tell you all about it," said the President. He crossed to the door, and opened it, and looked out. He closed it, and came back to the windows and glanced behind the heavy curtains.

He stood looking down at me. He said slowly, "What I'm going to tell you must be kept to yourself. Completely and permanently. It must never be discussed, or hinted at, or even thought about."

He sat down to face me. "And above all," he said, "it must never be written up. . ."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold is back, and this time he really pulls a rabbit out of the hat. .Greg Garrett was a member of the Schooner Cafe baseball team that played semipros every Tuesday night. Greg's father believed that his son had been beaten to death by the other players on the team. It was a wild theory, but there was evidence to back it up.

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD SWINGS A BAT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold's tiny office on the second floor of Police Headquarters was rarely visited for social purposes, and he was a bit surprised one sunny August afternoon when Lieutenant Fletcher announced he had a visitor. The man was tall and handsome in the manner of someone approaching 60 who has spent his middle years well. He carried a long paper bag under one arm and he shifted the bag to shake hands with Leopold.

"My name is Avril Garrett. I hope I'm not imposing, Captain, but I've always been a generous contributor to the party, so I rather feel that entitles me to go to the top."

"We don't bother with politics too much here," Leopold said, shuffling some papers on his desk. "Just what can I do for you, Mr. Garrett?"

"It's about my son. He's been missing for three days. He hasn't been to work and he's not at his apartment."

"We have a missing persons desk just down the hall. I'm sure they—"

"I think he's been murdered."

Leopold reached for a pad and pencil. "Suppose you tell me the whole story. What's your son's name, and how old is he?"

"Greg. Gregory. He's twenty-three. This is a picture of

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him. It's recent, except that he grew a mustache about a month ago." The photo showed a clean-cut young man wearing a baseball uniform and sunglasses.

"Married?"

"No. He was engaged to a girl last winter, but I convinced him she was no good for him." Garrett sighed. "Greg's like so many other young people today—drifting, uncertain of the future. I put him through college and offered him a job in my real-estate office, but he turned it down."

"And your wife? What does she think?"

"I'm divorced, Captain. Greg's mother was unable to cope with the pressures of my success. It often happens to women when their husbands achieve a degree of social acceptance. You must know what I mean."

Leopold grunted and said nothing. His dislike of the man was growing, but he felt a certain pity for the missing son.

"In any event, Greg has been wasting himself at manual labor, working for a contractor with whom I have dealings. He spends his nights drinking at a neighborhood bar. Hardly the sort of life I imagined for my son."

Leopold went back to shuffling the papers on his desk. "I really don't see how—"

"The bar has a baseball team. See, he's wearing their uniform in this picture. They play other bars and some semipro teams in the area. I think my son was killed at their game Tuesday night. I think they beat him to death with baseball bats and buried his body somewhere."

"Come now, Mr. Garrett! Things like that just don't happen!"

"Don't they? I was looking for him last night, after I realized he was missing. I talked to the bar owner, a man called Tiny, who said the last time he saw Greg was at the game Tuesday evening. But when I spoke to some of the other players they seemed uneasy and evasive. They claimed to know nothing, but I looked in a big bag where they keep the balls and bats and mitts and I found this."

He picked up the long paper bag and drew out a baseball bat. As Leopold leaned forward, Garrett pointed out some spots near the thick end. "That looks like dried blood to me."

"Maybe," Leopold admitted. "But you can't be sure."

"I asked a fellow named Terry, one of Greg's close friends, about it. He said he killed a squirrel with the bat, but that seems unlikely to me."

"It seems more unlikely that

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a dozen or more young men would conspire to hide the facts of a murder. But I can have these stains checked by the lab if it'll make you feel any better."

"Greg's been missing three days. Something certainly has happened to him."

After Avril Garrett left his office, Leopold sent the baseball bat down to the lab for fingerprinting and blood analysis. An hour later he had a report. The prints were all smudged, but the stains were blood—human blood. Leopold sighed and reached for the intercom to summon Lieutenant Fletcher.

Fletcher had been out late the previous night, working on a robbery slaying that hadn't been wrapped up till after midnight. He grumbled when Leopold told him about Avril Garrett's missing son, and the bloodstains on the bat, foreseeing another late night. But he knew Leopold had no choice. The only other member of the department not busy on a case was policewoman Connie Trent, and she could hardly be expected to ask questions at a neighborhood bar without attracting attention.

So it was Fletcher who parked across the street from the Schooner Café and entered the bar just after seven o'clock. The bartender was reading the race results in the final edition of the afternoon paper, and two customers were arguing politics over half-empty beer glasses. It was early for the neighborhood. The men hadn't yet finished dinner and escaped from their middle-class homes and apartments.

"Beer," Fletcher said, hoping his gaudy sports shirt wasn't too conspicuous.

The bartender glanced up from his paper. "Bottle or draft?"

"Draft."

Fletcher drank about half of it before he asked, "Greg Garrett been around today?"

"You know Greg?" the bartender countered, his beefy face noncommittal.

"I'm an old friend. Someone said he hangs around here."

"He usually does. Haven't seen him since Tuesday night, though. His father was in here looking for him yesterday."

Fletcher sipped a bit more of his beer. "Is Terry around?"

"Terry Davis? Not yet, but he'll be here. Never misses a Friday night."

The bar filled gradually over the next half hour, mainly with neighborhood youths who drank beer and joked in loud voices. A few girls came in a group, and a couple of older

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residents who stood at the end of the bar trying to ignore the others.

"Terry here yet?" Fletcher asked the bartender at last.

"I thought you knew him. Sure, that's Terry by the jukebox."

Terry Davis was a sandy-haired youth with long sideburns and a ready smile that contrasted with a certain hardness in his eyes. "Greg Garrett?" he repeated in reply to Fletcher's question. "I think he's gone away for a few days. You know him?"

"His father thinks something happened to him." Fletcher opened his wallet to show his badge. There was no point in hiding it any longer if he expected to find any answers.

"A cop!"

"We're looking into his disappearance. There was something about a baseball team."

"Sure, the Schoonervilles. It's the bar team. We play every Tuesday night during the summer, and Tiny donates a half barrel of beer."

"Tiny?"

"The bartender. He owns the joint. He used to be fat so we called him Tiny. Now he's a little thinner, but we still call him Tiny."

"What about last Tuesday night? Did Greg play in the game?"

"Sure. We all did. It was against the Dutchtown Lancers, a semipro team. They beat us, five to three."

"What happened after the game?"

"Nothing. We drank some beer."

"And Greg Garrett?"

"Sure. He was there."

"But then he disappeared."

"Hell, no. He's just gone away for a few days, that's all."

"They don't know about it where he works. And he didn't tell his father anything."

"Why should he tell his father? He's over twenty-one."

Fletcher grunted and said, "Avril Garrett brought in one of your bats. It had blood on it."

"I killed a squirrel with it."

"The blood was human, fella."

Davis paled at the words. "I—I don't know anything about that. It must have been a different bat I used on the squirrel."

"Let's quit playing. What happened to Garrett?"

"I don't know. If anything happened to him, I don't know."

"Where do you play these games?"

"Out in South Mill Park—the field by the woods."

Fletcher knew the place. "I'll be talking to you again," he promised. He went back to

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the bar and drained his beer glass. It was still light enough for a quick drive out to South Mill Park.

It was a popular place for summer picnics and ball games, but this late in the evening there was only a single red Mustang in the parking lot when Fletcher pulled in. He parked and walked over to the ball field, where a few small boys from the neighborhood were sliding on the base paths, perhaps imagining themselves in the final game of the World Series.

Fletcher stared out across the field toward the distant woods, wondering just what he had expected to find here. The sun had dipped below the trees and it would be dark in another half hour. He strolled down the first-base line and then across the grass toward the outfield that ended at the woods. It was ridiculous to imagine Avril Garrett's son being clubbed to death with baseball bats in such a setting. He would simply take a look around the woods and report back to Leopold.

The park was quiet now. Even the boys had departed with the coming of dusk. Fletcher moved through the shadows of the trees like some fabled hunter stalking a deer. He'd just about given up when something caught his eye in the fading light—a small pile of freshly turned earth.

As he bent to examine it there was a noise to his right. He started to turn and caught a glimpse of the blunt back of a shovel just before it hit his temple with a flash of blinding pain. He felt himself falling.

Leopold stood over the hospital bed, staring down at Fletcher's bandaged head. Finally, when the Lieutenant opened his eyes, he asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Terrible, Captain. I got hit with a shovel."

Leopold nodded. "You've got some stitches, and a mild concussion. Nothing serious."

Fletcher tried to move his head, but it obviously pained him. "All I saw was a small pile of dirt, and then the shovel."

"A couple of high-school kids heard you moaning and found you around ten o'clock. We went out there and searched this morning."

"Find anything?"

Leopold nodded. "A grave. Freshly dug."

"Greg Garrett?"

"The grave was empty. Looks as if the body was hidden there temporarily. Whoever dug it out came back last night to move the body. Perhaps it was someone who saw you at the bar, and

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managed to get out there ahead of you."

"I'm sorry, Captain. If I'd had my wits about me I might have trapped us a murderer."

Leopold shrugged. "Now tell me everything that happened at the bar, and after you arrived at the park."

Fletcher ran through it all, and when he'd finished Leopold said, "So you only talked to Terry Davis and the bartender."

"Yeah, Tiny. He owns the place."

Leopold nodded. "I've been checking on him. He takes bets on football and baseball games. The Schooner is quite a sporting establishment."

"You think it was Tiny and Davis who killed Greg Garrett?"

"We'll see," Leopold said. "First we've got to find the body. Look, I'll leave you now. Carol's waiting to see you with the kids. Take it easy, and hurry back."

Fletcher managed a smile. "When you find the guy who swung that shovel let me know."

When Connie Trent came into his office with the files he'd requested, she found Captain Leopold swinging a baseball bat—one-handed, as if it were a club. He glanced up at her, taking in the trim summer pants suit and the new hairdo.

"I was just trying to decide if you could really kill a man with this thing. I guess you could, all right."

"If it's the same person who hit Fletcher with that shovel he packs a mean wallop." She spread the files on his desk. "How is the Lieutenant?"

"Coming along. He'll probably be out of the hospital by Monday." Leopold opened the file on the Schooner Club, but it was surprisingly slim. No drug arrests, no brawls—only the gambling he already knew about and one prostitution arrest. "How about Terry Davis? He seems to be a friend of Greg's."

"No record on him, Captain. He's clean."

"And this girl Greg Garrett was engaged to last winter?"

Connie consulted her notes. "Sandra McMillan. Want her address?"

Leopold nodded. "I want to talk to her."

"Oh, Avril Garrett phoned while you were at the hospital. He wanted to know if we'd made any progress."

Leopold thought about the empty grave. "No. If he calls again, tell him no progress."

Connie started to leave, then hesitated in the doorway. "Perhaps if I went to that bar—"

"You stay away from there,

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Connie. I sent Fletcher there last night and he's lucky to be still alive."

When he was alone, Leopold hefted the bat again and tried swinging it with both hands this time. He hadn't played baseball in 30 years, and even the weight of the bat felt strange to him.

Later he drove through the Saturday afternoon traffic to the new high-rise apartments on the south side where Sandra McMillan lived. The sight of the uniformed doorman told him at once that it was not an inexpensive place, and he wondered how a young working girl could afford it alone.

The doorman phoned up to the room and then informed Leopold, "Miss McMillan is away for a few days. Would you like to speak to her roommate, Miss Marcie Young?"

The voice on the phone was pleasant and youthful. "I don't know when Sandra will be back. Who is this?"

"Captain Leopold, Police. I'd like to come up and speak to you if I may."

"About Sandra?"

"About Greg Garrett."

There was silence for a moment and then, "I can give you five minutes. Then I have to go out."

He rode up on the elevator to the fifth floor and was greeted at the door by a tiny, fresh-faced girl. "They were engaged last winter, but they broke up," she told Leopold. "Neither of us has seen Greg since."

"Who broke it up?" Leopold asked, surveying the expensive décor. "Greg or Sandra?"

"Sandra, I guess. She told me he spent too much time at that bar, the Schooner."

"What else did she say about the Schooner?" Leopold took a wild shot. "Is it a gay bar?"

"No, nothing like that. But they were more interested in their ball games and drinking than in girls. Sandra didn't need that sort of husband, even with all his father's money."

"You know Avril Garrett?"

"I met him once. Greg brought him here to meet Sandra. What a pain! I couldn't wait till he was gone!"

"He affects people that way," Leopold agreed. "But what about Greg? What sort was he?"

"*Was?* You mean something's happened to him?"

"He's been missing since Tuesday night."

"Probably out drinking with his friends."

"Not this time. Did he ever go off like this before?"

"Sure. Once he went to New York with his friend Terry and a couple of prostitutes." She glanced at her watch and picked

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up her purse. "Your five minutes are up and I've got to go."

"One more question. This is a pretty fancy place. Do you girls split the cost?"

She hesitated a moment before answering. Finally she said, "Sandra pays most of it. I guess she gets money from her family."

"Where does she work?"

"Here at the apartment. She types manuscripts and things like that."

Leopold saw no sign of a typewriter, but he didn't press the point. He left the apartment with Marcie and accompanied her to the elevator. "Could Sandra be away with Greg?" he asked when they reached the ground floor.

"Not likely! Along with everything else, that mustache of his would certainly turn her off."

"Well, thanks for your time," he told her. "You've been a help." He watched while she slid behind the wheel of a scarlet Mustang the doorman had brought around, then turned back toward his own four-year-old Chevy. It was time, he decided, to have another talk with Avril Garrett.

He drove across town to Garrett's home and found him in the back yard practising his golf swing. Avril Garrett bristled at Leopold's first question and put down his club. "My son broke off the engagement and I'll tell you why. He broke it off after I showed him a private detective's report proving that Sandra McMillan and her roommate were nothing but call girls—high-priced prostitutes!"

"I see," Leopold said. The news didn't surprise him.

"Imagine my son involved with that sort of woman! I told him if he didn't drop her I'd cut him off without a penny!"

"Is it possible that Greg continued to see her even after the engagement was broken?"

"Certainly not! Why would he do such a thing?"

Leopold didn't pursue it. Instead he asked, "Did Terry or the others at the bar know about Sandra?"

"I suppose so."

"All right," Leopold said. "Sorry I interrupted your golf practise."

"Interrupt me any time, Captain. Only find out what happened to my son."

"I'm trying to do just that, Mr. Garrett."

Terry Davis shifted his weight on the bar and ordered two more beers. Then, as an afterthought, he asked, "You'll go for another, won't you, honey?"

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Connie Trent smiled up at him. "Sure, why not?"

She knew she was violating Leopold's orders by visiting the Schooner Café, knew she might well end up with a reprimand or even a suspension. But the alternative was to sit at home thinking about Fletcher in the hospital and a dead man hidden somewhere in the city. She decided it was worth a trip to the Schooner.

On a Saturday night the place was crowded, and it took her a bit of maneuvering to pick out Terry Davis and arrange to stand next to him at the bar. She was wearing her white sweater and brown miniskirt—the only girl in the place not in jeans—and perhaps for this reason he noticed her. By the time he'd bought the second beer they were like old friends.

"Tell me about this baseball team," she pressed. "Do you play every week?"

"Every Tuesday night. Come out and watch us."

"Oh, I don't know—"

"Some of the girls usually come. Tiny springs for beer. It's like a party afterwards."

"Oh? I have a girl friend who told me about some baseball beer parties she went to last summer. I wonder if you know her."

"Maybe. What's her name?"

"Sandra, but I always called her Sandy. Sandy McMillan."

Terry Davis paused with the beer glass halfway to his lips. "You know Sandra?"

"I used to. Haven't seen her around lately."

"She was engaged to one of the guys last winter, but it didn't last."

Suddenly Tiny the bartender was there, leaning across the bar to join in the conversation. "What's this about Sandra?"

Terry put down his glass. "Tiny, this is—what's your name, honey? Connie. She's a friend of Sandra's."

"Sandra hasn't been around here in more than six months," Tiny said, making a point of it. "You lookin' for her?"

"Not really. We were just talking."

Tiny's eyes went to Terry, and some signal might have passed between them. The bartender said a few words about the warm summer weather, then drifted away to other customers. "He's a nice guy," Terry said. "He backs the team with money and beer, and usually comes out to lead the cheers himself."

"This fellow Sandy was engaged to—that wouldn't have been Greg Garrett, would it?"

Terry studied her intently. "So you know Greg, too."

"No, but Sandy talked about him a great deal."

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"He's a nice guy."

She glanced around at the crowded faces. "Is he here tonight?"

"No. He's gone away."

"Vacation?"

"Yeah. Probably won't be back till after Labor Day."

She sucked in her breath and said, "I'm hungry. Any place around here to get a sandwich?"

"When he's not busy, Tiny makes them. But tonight we'd better go down to the corner."

"I don't want to take you away from your friends."

He shrugged and tossed some coins for the beers. "I see them every night. Come on, honey."

Outside, in the balmy night air, he led the way to his car. "You're pretty dressed up for a Saturday night at the Schooner."

"I didn't know how casual things were here. Next time I'll wear my jeans."

"Sure," he said, unlocking the door of his blue Plymouth.

He held the car door for her, then went around to the other side and slid behind the wheel. She knew they weren't headed for the place on the corner—a car wasn't necessary to go half a block. "Do you have some other place in mind?" she asked.

"Yeah. I know a lunch counter down the road."

She knew at once that he was lying, and her hand went for her bulky purse. He shot the car across an intersection and swerved down a dark driveway between two buildings. They came to a stop in an empty parking lot out of sight of the street. "What is this?" Connie demanded. "You could at least give a girl a little warning!"

Terry grabbed for the purse. They struggled over it silently for some seconds, but he was stronger. He yanked it away and emptied it onto the seat between them. "You're no friend of Sandra's," he said. "She hated being called Sandy. And her only friends were call girls and hookers like herself. You're not one of them, or you wouldn't be wearing an outfit like that. You're a cop, aren't you?"

The little service revolver was on the car seat between them, with her lipstick and wallet and keys. There was no denying it. "That's right. Policewoman Connie Trent, and I'm taking you in for questioning."

"Like hell you are! You're looking for Greg, aren't you?" She made a move for the gun and he slapped her hard across the face. "Aren't you?"

The pain brought tears to her eyes, but this was not the moment to admit she was

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frightened. "What happened to him?"

"What happened is over. It was an accident, and no one's going to prison for life because of an accident."

"That's for a jury to decide. Just tell me what happened."

He shook his head. "That might have worked before the detective was slugged, but not now."

Her hand had worked its way to the door handle behind her. Twisted on the seat, facing him in the near darkness, she knew he couldn't see what she was doing. "What are you going to do to me?" she asked, and then before he could answer she yanked on the handle and threw herself backward out of the car.

She hit the asphalt hard and heard him cursing in the darkness above her. If he went for the gun she knew she didn't have a chance. But the door slammed and he started the motor. Quickly she was on her feet, running toward the lighted street. The car turned in a tight circle and its headlights came on, targeting her. But now she was running up the driveway.

She heard the car behind her, gaining, as she broke onto the sidewalk and jumped from its path. Terry Davis kept going, onto the street, just as a police car came into view.

Then the action blurred in Connie's vision. Terry's car was attempting a U-turn when the police car cut it off, and then an unmarked car blocked it from the other direction. Terry came out from behind the wheel, trying to run, but two cops pulled him to the pavement before he reached the curb. Then somehow Captain Leopold was there, getting out of the unmarked car, hurrying across to where she stood, bruised and dirty. He put an arm gently around her.

"There now," he said. "I should have known better than to think you'd stay away."

Connie Trent downed a steaming cup of coffee and turned to Leopold. "All right, how did you find me?"

"The bar's owner, Tiny Burgess, phoned in. I guess he wasn't taking any chances on a charge that might lose him his license."

"But I thought Tiny was in league with Terry on this."

"Apparently not. Tiny spotted you for a cop right away, and he was afraid of what Terry might do. After the attack on Fletcher he was worried."

Connie sighed and drank more coffee. "I guess I'm a bust as an undercover cop. I might as well have gone in there wearing a sign."

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"Your dress didn't help—it's not that sort of place. And after Fletcher's visit last night they were all on guard."

She looked at Leopold and tried to smile. "I'm sorry, Captain."

"We found you in time, and that's the important thing. If you hadn't run out from between those buildings when you did, we might have gone right by."

"Terry said the killing was an acoident."

"Tell me his exact words. It's very important."

When she'd finished, Leopold simply nodded. "That's about what I thought."

"Has he told you where the body is?"

"I'm going to ask him now. You stay here and drink your coffee."

He went down the hall to the Interrogation Room where Terry Davis was waiting with two detectives. Leopold pulled up a chair and sat down opposite the young man. "I suppose you know you're in big trouble, Terry."

"I guess so," he answered, head down.

"Want to tell me about last Tuesday?"

Terry was silent a long time. Finally he said, "It was just another ball game. We play every week out there."

"What happened after the game?"

"A few of us hung around drinking beer."

"Greg Garrett was there?"

"Yeah."

"And Tiny?"

"No. He'd already gone. But I guess he knew something happened after he left."

"Who else was there besides you and Greg? Who are you protecting, Terry?"

"Nobody."

"If you'd swung that bat yourself, you'd have damn well washed the bloodstains off it. You made up the story about killing the squirrel on the spur of the moment, when Greg's father noticed the blood. Did you think the killer had washed it off for you?"

Terry Davis didn't answer. He was staring down at his hands.

After a moment Leopold said, "You don't have to tell me. I know."

When Lieutenant Fletcher was released from the hospital on Monday morning, Leopold was there to pick him up. He ran quickly through the events of Saturday night, concluding with the questioning of Terry Davis.

"Didn't he confess yet?" Fletcher asked. He seemed in good spirits, though he still

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wore a bandage on his head.

"He didn't confess because he's not guilty. This is a very complex case, Fletcher."

"But if he didn't kill Garrett, who did? You told me Tiny had left the scene before it happened."

"He did, but there was someone else at the game last Tuesday—someone nobody talked about."

"Who was that?"

Leopold was now headed toward the south side of the city, away from headquarters. "Greg was engaged to a girl named Sandra McMillan. His father forced him to break it off last winter, when the old man discovered that Sandra and her roommate were high-priced call girls. I visited the roommate, Marcie Young, on Saturday. She denied they'd seen Greg since last winter, but she knew he had a mustache which his father told me he didn't start growing till last month. She also mentioned a time when Greg and Terry went down to New York with a couple of prostitutes—but she didn't mention the fact that the girls were herself and Sandra."

"You mean Greg was still seeing this Sandra without his father's knowledge?"

"Exactly. I spent all day yesterday checking out that New York trip and questioning some of the other ball players. Sandra and Marcie often came to the games this summer, and afterwards they'd go out with Greg and Terry. But Greg's father was still good for some money, and Greg didn't want the old man to know he was still seeing Sandra. I don't doubt Avril Garrett would have cut Greg off without a penny if he found out."

"Where are we going now?" Fletcher asked, glancing out at the rows of high-rise apartments.

"I need you to make an identification," Leopold answered, "before we move in for the arrest." He turned the car into the driveway of one of the apartments, heading around back where a row of tenants' autos were parked in their carports. "See anything familiar?"

Fletcher drew a quick breath. "That red Mustang—there was one like it in the parking lot at South Mill Park. I drove in right next to it."

"Exactly. The person who hit you with the shovel had to be there ahead of you. And you told me that was the only car in the lot. There are quite a few red Mustangs in the city, but the coincidence seemed too unlikely."

"Whose car is it?"

"Belongs to Marcie Young,

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Sandra's roommate. I saw her drive away in it Saturday. I've had the place staked out since then." He signaled a plain-clothesman who was hovering in the doorway of the next building.

The tall detective came around to Leopold's side of the car. "She hasn't been out since Saturday, Captain."

"Any visitors?"

"Not a one, according to the doorman."

Leopold nodded. "Let's go up, Fletcher. I've got a search warrant in my pocket."

"Should I wait here, Captain?" the detective asked.

Leopold nodded. "Watch the car, and arrest anyone who tries to drive it away."

On the way in Fletcher asked, "How do you know we'll find anything, Captain?"

"Marcie is a call girl, and her overhead is high. If she hasn't had any customers for two nights there's probably a good reason for it."

The doorman phoned her to announce them, then said, "She's just going out. Can she see you here in the lobby?"

"Tell her that won't be satisfactory. I have a search warrant for her apartment."

The doorman spoke into the phone, then hung up. "She says to come on up."

Leopold entered the elevator and pressed the button for the fifth floor, then quickly left the car before the doors slid shut. He motioned Fletcher to the fire stairs next to the elevators. They had only a moment to wait before they heard someone coming down the steps. Leopold slipped the gun from his holster.

The man above rounded the corner of the stairs suddenly and stopped dead when he saw them. His shoulders sagged and then he slowly raised his hands. "What is this?" he asked. "A robbery?"

"You know better than that," Leopold told him. "You're Greg Garrett, and I'm arresting you for the murder of Sandra McMillan."

Connie Trent entered Leopold's office with the coffee, her face alive with curiosity. "All right, you two! Just tell me how you knew Greg Garrett was alive, and how you knew he'd murdered Sandra."

Fletcher grinned at her. "Ask the Captain. He's the one who pulled the rabbit out of the hat."

Leopold took a sip of coffee and started to talk. "I've already explained how I knew Greg was still seeing Sandra against his father's wishes. And I was pretty sure the person who hit Fletcher and dug up

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the body was driving Marcie's car at the time. Since this person was almost certainly the murderer, it seemed as if one or both of the girls were involved. But the car was Marcie's, and she claimed Sandra was away—so Marcie seemed the most likely candidate. But was she the murderer?"

"I'd have thought so at that point," Connie admitted.

"But we have to consider what happened to the victim. Killed with this baseball bat, which would require a good deal of strength." He swung the bat to demonstrate. "Then buried in a shallow grave in the woods near the ball field. Finally dug up by the killer when we started asking questions and snooping around. Certainly the killer wouldn't leave the body in the same general area after slugging Fletcher with the shovel. But if the body was removed, how was it done?"

"In the trunk of that red Mustang!" Connie exclaimed.

"Exactly. The only logical way. But are we to believe that a tiny girl like Marcie Young crushed a man's skull with a baseball bat, buried him, then dug him up, and carried or dragged the body the entire length of that baseball field to her waiting car? Acting alone? Either she had a helper—or someone else was using her car."

"I'll go along with that," Fletcher agreed. "No girl as tiny as she is landed that shovel on my head."

"So we see that Marcie Young is *implicated* in the killing, but *not alone*. Next question: how did Marcie or her accomplice know the police were asking questions at the Schooner? How did they know the body had to be moved before Fletcher came snooping around the park? Only if someone at the Schooner told them. It could have been Tiny, but he cleared himself by warning me later that Connie was in trouble.

"That left Terry Davis, the only other person to whom you spoke, Fletcher. Davis' involvement was confirmed when he got rough with Connie on Saturday night. Was Terry also the murderer?

"No, because he didn't wash off the bloodstained bat, as I've already explained. And besides, he drives a blue Plymouth. He wasn't likely to be at the park with Marcie's red Mustang."

"So he was shielding the real killer."

Leopold nodded. "And would he be shielding Marcie? Would he have tipped her off if she or Sandra had killed his best friend? It's doubtful—as doubt-

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ful as Avril Garrett's theory of the players beating his son to death with their bats. It's far more likely that Terry was protecting Greg.

"There's confirmation of this in the very fact that the killer was anxious to move the body. We already suspected Greg was dead—why then take the risk of moving the body to a better hiding place? You see, the body had to be moved because it *wasn't* Greg—it was Sandra. And once we knew Sandra was the victim and Greg was in hiding we'd know *he* killed *her.*"

"But why did he do it?" Connie asked.

"The motive was cloudy at first, but I finally got to it. Sandra wanted money. If she couldn't get it from Greg she threatened to go to his father and demand to be bought off. She went to the ball game last Tuesday and threatened Greg after most of the others had left. There was a fight and he hit her with a bat. Maybe it was accidental, maybe not. Terry and Marcie either witnessed it or were told about it later.

"Anyway, Greg buried her in a shallow grave and went into hiding in his victim's apartment, with Marcie. He's been there since Tuesday night, except when he had to go out to move the body. That's why Marcie was so anxious to get me out Saturday, and why she didn't conduct her usual business over the weekend."

"And Sandra's body?"

"They never thought beyond digging it up," Leopold said. "It was still in the trunk of that red car."

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a *NEW* crime story by

ROBERT TWOHY

After too long an absence from the pages of EQMM, Robert Twohy returns with a prison story — a tale of the grim, relentless struggle between two men, jailer and jailed, each determined to have his way. . .

VENGEANCE

by ROBERT TWOHY

Sergeant Eglanti stood outside Castell's cell. Castell, lying on his mat, could see Eglanti's smooth pale face, sliced by the bars of the grill in the padded door.

"Of the twenty prisoners here you are the dirtiest."

Castell lay there, with only his pants on, his sunbaked torso caked with dirt from the river. His face, between the hair and the tangled beard, was a gray wedge in which blue eyes stared steadily at Eglanti's bar-sliced face.

He heard the rattle of keys and the click of the lock. The padded door swung open. Eglanti came in, pushing the door behind him, and turned momentarily to lock it.

It was eight o'clock. Castell had had his supper. The tin plate full of an unidentifiable mess had been slid through the grille which could be raised from the outside; a tin cup had contained a greasy fluid that was called coffee. After supper Castell had dozed, half dreaming of Eglanti.

Now Eglanti was here. Castell lay still, dirty hands on his chest, only his eyes alive as Eglanti stared down at him.

"And your cell is the filthiest. You have no pride, Castell. Your spirit is broken."

"No," said Castell, looking back at him.

"Then why can't you at least wash off at the end of the day like the other prisoners?"

Castell did not reply. Eglanti loomed over him in his khaki clothes. Across his chest was a gleaming black belt. On his hip

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was a holster held by a clip which Englanti had to press with a thumb to release the gun. On Eglanti's shoulders were the straps of a sergeant, straps Castell had worn a year before. At that time Eglanti had been Castell's corporal.

"Well," said Eglanti, "it's obvious. In the last few weeks you've gotten old and despairing. You're an old animal, waiting to die."

Eglanti, gazing down at him with his small bright brown eyes, smiled. The corners of his soft brown mustache lifted, exposing a gleam of snowy teeth.

Castell said, in his rusty voice, "I'll live long enough."

"For what?"

"Vengeance."

Eglanti laughed. "Here you lie, a skeleton. You were fat, Castell, when you came to this cell. Now you're just skin and bones. You barely have the strength to drag through the day. And here you lie, with not even the strength to move. Would you attack me, pluck my gun from the hoster?" The soft laugh again.

"But I don't underestimate you," Eglanti went on. "I don't underestimate your hatred for me. I know that every possible scheme has gone through your mind. That is why you—all the prisoners but especially you—are constantly searched. As you come back from the river at the end of the day—to be sure you haven't concealed a rock or a sharp stick in your pants. And your cell is searched—under your mat, inside it. And the hole, even that's checked."

Eglanti gestured to the hole in the dirty stone floor that was Castell's latrine. The jailer smiled—one lid came down in a kind of wink. "Eternal vigilance, Castell—that's the price a good jailer must pay. . .You notice I always lock your cell door behind me? The enemy isn't always just inside the cell."

"Something," said Castell, "that I overlooked."

"Yes. And now you pay the price."

Eglanti turned to the door. "Lie in your filth and dream of vengeance. Draw hope from the dream. But Saturday, which is three days from now, important visitors from the capital are coming. They will look over the prison. A day off for all the prisoners! Saturday you will dress in clean shirt and pants, clean socks—yours in the corner are abominably dirty, as always.

"Saturday morning you will be marched to the river and your clothes will be washed spotless. And your body, too—for the first time in weeks. And the cell here—you will be given a broom, a scrub rag. . .and in the end, you will present a

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radiant picture. That's why I stopped in tonight—to give you that word. And also to tell you: when the boat bringing the visitors leaves I will be aboard."

Castell felt dismay. "You're being transferred?"

"No. A leave. I am going back to be married."

"Congratulations." Castell's voice was dry.

"Thank you. But as you know, my fiancée's father is a Sergeant-Major. I have every hope that during my leave he will use his considerable influence to arrange my transfer to his company. In which case I will not be returning here."

A mock bow. "If you seriously plan vengeance it had better be before I go." He turned, still smiling, and went out.

Castell lay in the dark. At night the prison was stifling; damp rose through the ground, through the floor, through the thin mat, so that one gasped for air, and at the same time shivered. A small barred window in the wall gave a glimpse of the brooding night sky. Below it was the jungle, and the river, in which he and others, in chains, toiled daily, building with heavy stones and timbers the dam that would never be completed—that had been the project for years, the full 16 years that Castell had been in charge of the prison; that had been, in fact, Castell's invention.

The purpose of the dam was to work the prisoners, all of whom were political, to exhaustion and early death. The splendor of the concept, as devised by Castell, was that, as the dam began to close off the river, the water inevitably rose over its banks, washing out the anchoring section of the dam and ultimately sending the whole construction down the current. So then it had to be started all over again. One supervised the laying of the anchoring section with this object in mind.

Three years before, Eglanti had arrived at the prison colony and had become Castell's assistant on the dam. The corporal had learned well. The past year, since he had taken charge, the dam had collapsed precisely when it should have, no less than three times.

Castell lay sweating and shivering under his sparse blanket and thought not of the dam or the river or the jungle, but of Eglanti, who in a few days would be leaving—and wondered if his plan of vengeance would work. If not, Castell would die, unsatisfied.

He would die in any case. That was certain. His sentence was eight years. Only a year of

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it had passed, and already the toil, the heat, the cold, the starvation diet had taken their toll. There was no possibility he would live even another year. A few more months at most; he knew death was inside him now, eating away at his vitals. Which was all right—who wanted to live on as a prisoner here?

But first he had to pay Eglanti. To do to Eglanti what Eglanti had done to him. Eglanti could not leave before what Castell had dreamed of so often should take place.

He must prove to Eglanti, that master schemer, that he, Castell, was still the Sergeant, still the superior—that Castell could plan and carry out Eglanti's downfall in just such a masterful way as Eglanti had planned and carried out his.

Then death would be welcome.

A year before, in this same six-by-six cell, its walls padded with mattresses screwed into the stone, had resided one Da Pinta, a thin gray creature, a pamphleteer or anarchist or some such, condemned for his activities to ten years of servitude. He was of no interest to Sergeant Castell at the time—just one of 20-odd scarecrows toiling in their chains in the mud of the river, or gasping and shivering in the cells.

Castell had paid Da Pinta routine visits, as he did to all of them, primarily to search the cells for possible weapons, or to shout at them, or bully them, if that was his fancy. The guards here did not physically abuse the prisoners: the river was for that. Castell's decree, carried on by Eglanti, was that you did not hurry a man's death by beating him or causing him injury; his sentence was for such-and-such a time, and the poor devil must serve as much of it as his constitution would stand.

On the night of his downfall Castell, fat and sleek in his spotless uniform, paid just such a routine visit. It happened to be a time when two of the guards were in the prison kitchen, having their dinner; two soon to go on duty were still sleeping; and Corporal Eglanti was in the front office, working on some forms.

Castell had a vivid memory of gazing down at Da Pinta, just as Eglanti had so recently gazed down at him, barking out a command to stand, to turn over his mat—and that was his last memory of the scene.

He awoke with a splitting headache and realized he was lying on the floor of the cell. The cell door was open and Da Pinta was gone.

Staggering to the door,

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shouting hoarsely, Castell had grasped for his pistol and found it was also gone

The office was empty He threw open the door of the guards' sleeping room—nobody was there

He started to rush outside, but the agonizing pain in his head caused him to collapse at the desk, where he sat, clutching his head, groaning and nearly fainting

Then a voice came to him: "Sergeant Castell "

He raised his head. It was Eglanti Behind him were the guards, all four; all were mud-flecked

"We pursued the prisoner. He escaped across the river."

Castell groaned and shut his eyes, because of the agony in his head

"We spread out, but couldn't find him."

Castell said in a thick voice, "He can't live in the jungle."

"Perhaps not. But until we find his body he must be listed as escaped."

"We'll find his body. We'll find him. I've never had a prisoner escape."

Eglanti said, in his soft respectful voice, "There's blood on your head. You're hurt. You must go up to the compound for medical treatment." On the hill above the prison was the Commissioner's residence, and the other buildings of the colony where upper officials lived; the Commissioner had as little as possible to do with the prison, leaving its operation in the care of the Sergeant.

"Later." Castell was on his feet; but the pain was excruciating, and everything was blurred and swaying. "Right now—must catch him." Even in his pain, his brain registered the consequence of a prisoner escaping.

"We've searched. It's useless. At least until morning. Perhaps in daylight we'll find him. Sit down. What did he attack you with?"

Castell fell back in the chair and stared up through a haze, seeing Eglanti's smooth pale face, his brown mustache, his bright brown eyes. "He didn't. Somebody else. You."

"Sir?"

"You. Came behind me, hit me. Took my gun. You let him go."

"Really, Sergeant, you shouldn't be talking. You and you!" Crisply, to two of the guards, the note of authority sharp in his voice, Eglanti said, "Help the Sergeant up. Get him to the compound, to the doctor. I'll go to the Commissioner and make my report."

"No," said Castell. "I order you under arr—" But everything gave way for him then and he fell into whirling blackness.

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He was in the tiny compound hospital for several days, unable to speak. Then the time came that he opened his eyes and gazed into the tight little face of the Commissioner.

The Commissioner had a paper, from which he read:

"I am instructed by the capital to reduce you to rank of private, and you are dishonorably discharged from the service. According to Article 49 of the Military Prisons Code, you are hereby sentenced to fulfill the term of the prisoner Da Pinta, whom you permitted to escape, such sentence to be served at this prison, commencing immediately on completion of your stay in the hospital."

"Am I permitted to say anything?"

"What can be said? You were in charge, the prisoner escaped."

"He can't have escaped. He's dead, either in the jungle or the river."

"A search has failed to produce his body."

"The crocodiles ate him. Or jaguars. How could a man in his condition possibly have survived?"

"I am not here to argue. I have read you the sentence, which by law is mandatory."

"Eglanti did it," Castell said. "He hit me from behind with his gun." He looked over the Commissioner's shoulder. Eglanti stood there, watching him with his bright eyes.

"That's merely a statement. Do you have any proof?" asked the Commissioner.

"No."

"Then there's no point discussing it, is there?"

Castell said, his voice low, "I've served here sixteen years. With never a mark against me. Is that worth nothing?"

"The sentence is mandatory," said the Commissioner. "There is no appeal." He turned and marched out.

Castell stared at Eglanti. The latter smiled.

Castell said, "I suppose you're Sergeant now."

"I've been appointed—pending approval from the capital, of course."

"That's why you did it, isn't it? To become Sergeant."

Eglanti said softly, "My beloved's father is a Sergeant-Major. He'll be much more inclined to accept me now."

"You ruined me for another strap on your shoulder."

"Here in the colony values are their own. Each must do what he can to get what he craves."

There was a hope in the early weeks that Da Pinta's body would be found. In that

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case it would be maintained that he had failed to serve out his term because of unavoidable circumstance—namely, death; and Castell would be relieved of the burden of completing Da Pinta's sentence, although the dishonorable discharge would stand. Still, at 45, there would be some kind of life Castell could find.

But the hope faded. And it was finally, utterly dashed one evening when Sergeant Eglanti came to his cell.

"Are you wondering how the search is going?" Eglanti asked.

"Are you still searching?"

"Why shouldn't we be?"

"Yes, why shouldn't you? After all, you're the Sergeant now. You're in charge. What can you lose if you find his body?"

Eglanti's mustache curved. "That would put you outside—and for my safety I prefer you inside. Yes, we are still searching"—his voice was low—"but the body will never be found."

Castell felt a chill.

"No. You see, I found Da Pinta that first night. Directed the others away and followed his trail. Shot him by the bank of the river and dumped the body in—along with your gun. Of course the crocodiles immediately got the blood scent. And all that will ever be found of Da Pinta, if anything ever is, will be a few unidentifiable bones."

"So you confess everything. Including attacking me."

"Of course. No harm now. You'll never see the Commissioner again."

"I could tell the other guards."

"They will have no interest in your ravings. You're just another prisoner now."

And so he was—toiling in his chains on the dam that would never be finished, swilling down the mess they served him at morning and evening, gradually collapsing within, the rot of despair, the longing for death, setting in. His one compelling thought, all that kept him going, was to do unto Eglanti as Eglanti had done unto him.

Lately he had stopped washing, letting filth accumulate on his body and in his cell—like a man with an obsessive plan who has no thought of any other thing.

Saturday visitors would come and there would be an inspection. A day or so later the boat that had brought them would depart—and on it would be Eglanti.

"Friday," Castell muttered, staring at the tiny patch of purple through the barred window. "Friday it must be."

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Friday he toiled in his chains on the dam. A strange joy began to fill him. Faith in his plan soared. This would be the last day. His sick, pain-racked body would find peace. More important, his mind would find peace. Tonight Eglanti would come to him. Tonight he would pay back Eglanti.

He gazed at the oozing brown waters below the dam. Brown and green shapes lay in it, like rocks. They were the backs and heads of crocodiles, floating. The river was alive with them. Da Pinta had made a meal for them, and it had probably been consumed in an instant. Those sluggish bodies could move like streaks when the smell of blood promised a feast.

Castell smiled, even as he bent to lift a heavy stone, and a grimace remained on his lips as he staggered with it in his quivering arms, to drop it in its place at the end of the dam.

The sun began to drop. Other prisoners, eyeing the still crocodiles, cautiously rinsed themselves at the edge of the river. Not Castell. He walked in his chains and his muck back to the prison.

He lay awhile, then got up and brushed caked mud from his torso. His supper came. He ate the mess and pushed the plate and cup back through the grille, which fell and clanked shut.

Now Eglanti would be eating, and if he followed his usual custom, would soon come sauntering down to visit with his favorite victim.

Castell crouched on the floor, working feverishly, making solid the weapon that would bring about his vengeance.

He heard Eglanti's boots. The weapon was ready. Castell tucked it under his mat. He straightened and was standing at the barred window, staring out, when Eglanti's boots stopped in front of the door.

The lock clicked and the door shrilled open. Castell turned. Eglanti pushed the door shut, locked it, and hooked the ring of keys in his belt. "What were you staring at?"

"The moon."

"The moon's barely up yet. You couldn't see it from here. You're losing your mind, Castell."

Castell shrugged. He turned again to the window.

"No, the moon is an illusion. Like your illusion of revenge . . . Inspection tomorrow, remember? A clean bright cell. And to the river with you, early, to wash your filthy clothes and body."

Eglanti had come up beside him. His hand rested on the gun

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at his hip—as if there were any way Castell's scrawny arm could pluck it from its clip. "The moon," said Eglanti, looking out. "No, not the moon, just the purple sky, a few stars . . . do you really imagine you see the moon?"

"A small part of it, off to the corner." Castell had drawn away a few feet and was now near the mat. He watched Eglanti's head turn to the right, away from him, staring up, and quickly bent his knees and retrieved his weapon, which he held at his side.

Eglanti chuckled. "An illusion only. A spot on your brain. There's no moon to be seen."

Castell took a step forward and swung with all his strength at the strong round neck that showed under the bulge of Eglanti's brown hair. At the last split second the Sergeant sensed something and hunched his shoulders—but the weapon crashed softly against the spot Castell had mentally marked.

Eglanti's face smashed against the bars. He groaned. Castell, panting, drew back to swing again, but the Sergeant slid down the padded wall and lay crumpled at his feet.

Castell stared down. The smooth face was pallid, the eyes were closed. A blue vertical line, oozing blood, marked the forehead.

Castell plucked at the fat dirty sock he held in his hand, untying the knot he had made in the top, and turned it over, spilling out the hard dried mud he had accumulated, the muck from the river that he had brought in nightly on his body. He took apart the weapon that was the only one he could have possibly smuggled into his cell. He threw the sock in the corner with the rest of his filthy clothes, and kicked the pile of dried mud about. Let them stew over it later, wonder what had been his weapon of vengeance.

Bending, he released the catch of Eglanti's holster-clip and pulled out the pistol. From the belt he unhooked the ring of keys. He knew well enough every key on it. He looked again at the fallen body, and smiled thinly. Then he let himself out of his cell, pulled the door behind him, and locked it.

Down the corridor was the office. A guard sat there at the desk, working on a report. Two guards would be off in the kitchen eating; and in the room behind the closed door of the office, the two night guards slept.

The guard looked up, and his eyes went wide and fearful as he stared at Castell, wearing only his torn filthy pants, the

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key ring thrust in them, and holding the gun.

"Get up." Castell went behind him, pressed his thumb on the clip, and took out the guard's gun.

"Now come with me." He laid the guard's gun on the desk.

"What are you going to do?"

"Take you for a walk."

They walked out of the prison. There was a cleared area, then the path into the jungle. Little moonlight showed yet, but Castell could have walked the path blindfolded. He had walked it nearly every day for 17 years.

The guard walked in front of him. "Have you killed the Sergeant?"

"No." Castell smiled. "He's strong and young. He has a long life ahead of him."

They walked half a mile. Now they were near the bank of the river.

"Go back," said Castell. "Raise the alarm. By the time you do I'll be across the river, and safe."

"But—you can't live in the jungle."

"Go back. I'll be watching you. If you stop, even for a moment, I'll kill you."

He watched until the man was out of sight. He waited, in case the guard might stop and return—but after a minute it was clear he would be making his way as fast as possible back along the path to the prison.

Castell turned and walked on. He was at the river now, gleaming—sickly brown under the rising moon—with shapes in it here and there, like rocks.

He stepped down and into the water. To his left rose the jutting mass of the dam that would never be finished. He stood a moment, picturing Eglanti there, toiling in chains, gasping under the weight of heavy stones. Castell smiled.

He dropped the ring of keys into the water. He walked out until the water was nearly to his waist. The gun was at his head now. He walked slowly, watching shapes like rocks—but now the rocks were moving, slowly, toward him. He thought of Eglanti, and felt at peace.

One of the shapes darted suddenly, in a rush of water made silver by its charge. Castell pulled the trigger. His body fell forward. There was a film of blood on the water, and all the dark shapes rushed to the place.

"Q"

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The thought that "a policeman's lot is not a happy one" has become a cliche. But there's one thing to remember about cliches—too often they're true, especially in these times . . .

POLICEMAN'S LOT

by WILLIAM BANKIER

When Danny Peterson swung the iron bar, the store window shattered with a noise that struck Danny's ears like a scream. But he was prepared for it. Poor Ginko, watching the deserted street for cops, was taken by surprise and jumped—straight up off the ground with both feet in the air, like a character in a cartoon. Danny started to laugh and Ginko soon caught the hysteria, so they were giggling and clutching each other while the alarm bell clamored steadily.

They were still laughing in spasms as they reached in carefully past the shards of broken glass and lifted out expensive transistor radios, tape decks, and cassette players. Ginko held the flight bag open while Danny stacked the units gently, not wanting to damage them.

And it was Ginko who heard the approaching footsteps first—a heavy tread in the adjoining alley, getting closer.

"Let's split," Ginko whispered, closing the bag.

Danny grabbed another radio in each hand and followed his friend to the corner, running quickly and silently. Here he paused and looked back to see a familiar shape appear out of the alley and stop in front of the broken window.

Sergeant Russell Cobb was breathing so hard he thought he would be sick. His heart was pounding and sweat dripped from his forehead into his eyes. The collar of his blue shirt gripped his throbbing neck like a vise and he tore away the top button, loosening the collar so he could get air. His five-foot ten-inch frame was lugging 260 pounds and he knew he had no strength left.

At the far corner Danny Peterson whispered after his friend who was beetling off through a parking lot. "It's all right, Gink. It's only the Pig."

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Lieutenant Oberon was glad of an excuse to end his interview with Sergeant Cobb. He was always uncomfortable talking to him. For one thing, Cobb was well in his forties while Oberon was only 29. He had an uneasy feeling the older man should be commanding him. Anyway, how could you reprimand a man who never said anything in his own defense?

The Sergeant just sat there like a big house with all the lights turned out. But Cobb was wrong, dammit, he was wrong. Any other officer happening on the scene of the break-in as soon as Cobb had would have made an arrest. Cobb did not even give chase.

So the subject of his weight came up again and of course Cobb said nothing. It was at this point that Asti came in with coffee and Oberon used the interruption as an excuse to send Cobb away.

When Cobb was gone, Asti, a very old Desk Sergeant, said, "Why do we keep him, Ted? He's been out from the city three months and he's done nothing."

"You don't know the story."

"All I know is the kids laugh at him. He's worse than useless." Sergeant Asti had begun taking his morning coffee in Oberon's office a year ago. The young Lieutenant didn't seem to mind. "In fact," Asti added, "he's an embarrassment."

"That's why he's here. He embarrassed them in the city, so they sent him to us."

"Why didn't they just bust him?"

Oberon sipped Asti's very good coffee and took a bite of the chocolate biscuit the Sergeant had propped against the saucer. "Russell Cobb was a Detective Sergeant in the toughest precinct in the city. He was one of the best."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true. He wasn't always like he is now. He had a great record. But one morning a few years back he put his two kids, a son and a daughter, in the car and drove them to an apartment house where some of their friends lived. He left them there to play while they waited for a school bus. He was about six blocks away when he heard an explosion. He drove back and the apartment house was gone."

"I remember that," Asti said. "Natural-gas explosion. Killed about fifty people."

"Including Cobb's son and daughter." Oberon set down the empty cup. "That was the end of his life. His wife drifted away and stayed drunk in bars most of the time. I think she blamed Cobb for taking the kids to the apartment house.

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And Russ started to turn into what you saw this morning. They took him off detective work because he lost all his drive. And when he got so fat they couldn't stand having him downtown, they sent him out here. It was that or bust him." Oberon looked at Asti. "But how can you bust a good man after he's taken a shot like that?"

Asti got up and gathered up the cups. "Well, one thing sure. He better lose about a hundred pounds or he's going to kill himself."

Oberon said, "I think that's what he's trying to do."

Danny Peterson sat on the park bench with his arm around Sandra Vijuk. Ginko was lying on the grass with an old fedora hat over his eyes and a brand-new cigar in his mouth, unlighted.

Danny had on the football sweater he'd worn last year during the most successful season his high school ever had. As quarterback of the undefeated team, he had been approached by several college scouts with offers of athletic scholarships. Danny had turned them all down. This had angered his father, had given his mother something new to cry about, and had caused Sandra to say for the twentieth time, "I can't figure you out, Danny."

Good marks had always come easily to Danny Peterson. Praise was always being heaped on his head by admiring adults —except at home where his father got drunk and beat him and his mother hung back with her crumpled face and worried about him. Maybe that was why he turned down the scholarships, because he knew his parents wanted him to take one. He'd have to figure out that whole scene one day.

Right now he was trying to figure out how to handle Luftspring. The man was due any minute. Luftspring must want him, but how much would he pay? Danny didn't want to price himself too low.

"Why are we sitting here?" Sandra said. "Come home with me and I'll make us some lunch."

"Later, kid. Later."

Sandra drew Danny's extended arm around her neck and bit him gently on the wrist. She was always trying to get him to come home with her but he never would. He had no interest in meeting her parents. In fact, he had nothing to do with any adults she knew of. Maybe he was afraid if he met her folks she'd expect to meet his. And she knew how he felt about his father.

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They were still sitting there when a short silver-haired man in a black suit walked by and sat on a bench about fifty feet away. Danny soon got up, said, "Hang in here, kid," and walked over to sit beside the man.

From his position Ginko watched it happen, his hat tipped back, one eye squinting down the cigar.

"What's he doing, Gink?" Sandra asked.

"He's making arrangements."

"What arrangements?"

"To get rich."

And that's how it seemed to Danny Peterson because Luftspring was in an agreeable mood. He accepted Danny's demand for ten percent with no dickering. The drugs would be supplied for Danny to push to his wide circle of friends, good stuff he could rely on with no chance of a bad trip and unsatisfied customers. The deal was closed and Danny was getting ready to rejoin his friends when Sergeant Russell Cobb drifted out of the park and came up behind their bench.

He said, "I thought it was you, Luftspring. Spreading your operations out to the suburbs?"

Luftspring's eyes glittered. "Cobb, I hardly recognized you. You sure have changed since the city." He glanced at Cobb's shirt, the blue material gaping between the buttons to show a flash of white underwear. "There's nothing sadder than a busted cop."

"We call him the Pig," Danny said. "All cops are pigs, but this guy really looks like one."

Cobb turned to the boy. "Son, I could swear I saw you the other night. Down the street from a store with a broken window."

"Your eyes are as out of shape as the rest of you."

The policeman glanced at the pretty girl who had approached and was standing a few feet away. He said to Danny, "Don't get involved with Luftspring, son. He's poison. You work for him and you're finished."

"All we're having is a private conversation," Luftspring said. "I saw the kid play football. I'm a fan of his."

Cobb looked at him for a moment, his stomach rising and falling, the breath wheezing in his throat. "Think of what I said, Danny." And Cobb walked away.

Cobb went from the park to his room, three blocks away, upstairs on a side street. He was off duty until seven o'clock. Most afternoons like this he poured himself a drink and sat in front of the TV, watching

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soap operas or an old movie or a ball game. After half an hour his head would sag and he would fall asleep in the chair.

Today the doorbell buzzed soon after he came in. He opened the door and saw the girl who had been standing in the park.

"Can I talk to you? Please?" She hung her head and looked up at him through a cloud of chestnut hair. About 16. He asked her in and she sat at the kitchen table.

It was a very ordinary plea. Cobb had heard many like it. She was worried about Danny. She knew he had done some holdups and break-ins, but now he was starting to mess with this bad guy from the city. Luftspring? Yes, the man on the bench. She had tried to reason with Danny but he wouldn't listen to her. Could Cobb do anything?

"I have no evidence to arrest the boy."

"I don't mean that. I mean could you talk to him. Try to straighten him out."

"Do you think he'd listen to me?"

She looked as though she might cry. "I heard the terrible things he said about you. But that's part of his problem. He's very mad all the time. He's always smiling but underneath he's mad. Not at you. At everybody. At everything."

Cobb didn't know what to do with a sixteen-year-old girl in his kitchen who seemed about to cry. He got her a glass of milk and a plate of peanut-butter cookies. She went on talking and after a while he got another glass of milk and a plate and helped himself to the cookies.

The talk was ordinary stuff, about the neighborhood and the boys she liked and the girls she was having arguments with. It was very comfortable and quite a lot of time went by. Cobb ended up promising to see if he could reason with Danny.

On the way out Sandra stopped and looked at a photograph on the wall in the living room. There were four people in it—a slim young man in gray slacks and a blazer, a pretty woman in a white dress, and two children, a boy and a girl, all holding hands and squinting into the sun. They were posed against a stucco wall with a row of hollyhocks bowing behind them.

"Is this your family?"

Cobb said, "It was but they died." He couldn't begin to sort out the confusion in that statement. Besides, the pretty woman in the white dress might as well be dead. "That's Norman—the boy—and that's Connie. She'd be your age now."

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Several days went by. Sergeant Cobb's back began to hurt him as it had done in the past. He put a board under the mattress and began shaving with one foot raised on the edge of the bathtub, to lock the vertebrae. Nothing helped, and he ignored the exercises the therapist had taught him last time.

He missed two days of patrols and spent the time in bed with the blinds down, losing track of day and night. When he reappeared on duty, his pace was even slower than usual and his huge face sagged with fatigue and pain. The kids in the park said, "The Pig is really a pig today." At the precinct Lieutenant Oberon made up his mind to have Cobb in and lay it on the line. One of these days.

Cobb found Danny Peterson in a back booth at Carlo's Restaurant. As he approached, a pale-faced scrawny teen-ager slipped out of the booth and edged past him, one hand thrust deep in his pocket. Cobb forced his way onto the bench across from Danny and caught a glimpse of the folded money Danny put into his pocket.

"Mind if we talk?"

"Not at all, Pig." Danny pushed his plate of French fries across the table. "Here. Eat. You look like you're wasting away."

"You realize I could grab that kid who just left you, spend five minutes with him, and you'd be in big trouble."

"Then why don't you?"

"Because Luftspring would just get himself another boy. I'd rather get him." Cobb reached over and took Danny's fork. He began eating the French fries.

"How about getting me?" Danny asked.

"I don't know about you. Really. I can't figure you out."

"Try," Danny said. "I'm interested."

"Well, it's as if you're playing some kind of silly game. You don't really mean it. I can spot all kinds of brains in you, all kinds of potential. You've got looks, energy, popularity."

Danny laughed. "Kiss me quick," he said.

"Sure. It's all a joke. It's like you feel you can get twenty points behind and still pass for three touchdowns in the last quarter and win. But you've overlooked something."

"What's that?"

"You could get your arm or leg broken. Not even finish the game."

Cobb wasn't sure he was getting through to the boy. He finished the French fries and started to rise. Danny looked at the empty plate and there was a strange soft expression on his face.

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"Stick around," he said. "I'll buy you a piece of pie."

Cobb was undecided. Then he made up his mind. He stayed and had the pie.

Lieutenant Oberon was glad of something to discuss with Cobb other than his deteriorating appearance. The report from Sergeant Asti who had seen Cobb and Peterson together was encouraging. Maybe some of the old detective sense remained.

"I like the way you're getting close to that kid. I'm sure he's a pusher. When can you make an arrest?"

"That isn't my plan."

"What is?"

"I want to change him. Straighten him out."

"Hell, don't try to straighten him out! Bust him." Oberon was so mad he wasn't thinking straight. "He's not your son, Cobb."

The two men sat in silence after that. Then Cobb got up and left.

Sandra Vijuk's feelings were mixed as she sat in the big convertible and waited for Danny to complete his phone call. His alliance with Luftspring still worried her. And as far as she knew, the big policeman's several conversations with Danny over the past few weeks had been ineffective. But the car looked good on her, she knew that. And here they were, heading up to the lake on a summer evening—she had dreamed of that kind of freedom.

The phone call in the isolated highway booth, which had begun casually, seemed to be taking a bad turn. She could hear Danny's voice raised in irritation.

"Listen, I've had a lot of expenses. You'll get your money. Big deal, so I'm a couple of payments behind." Danny listened, his face red, his big hand working on the door handle. "Go to hell, Luftspring. You don't scare me. One word from me to the cops and you're finished. You just try me. Cobb is very interested in you and I could tell him plenty."

He banged down the phone and crunched across the gravel shoulder. He was in the car and had the motor racing before he said, "They need me more than I need them." Then the big car gunned away.

They were both very tired when Danny parked the car in the market square at midnight. Their skin was sunburnt, their muscles aching from swimming. Sandra carried both damp bathing suits in a rolled towel as they strolled toward Carlo's at the end of the street.

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The voice from the alleyway came as a shock. "Just a word, Danny."

They both saw Luftspring at the same instant. Sandra tried to pull Danny away, but he saw the gun leveled at his stomach. "Get away, Sandy," he said. "I can handle this."

She ran and Danny stepped into the alley. Luftspring backed away a few paces.

"Stay right there," Luftspring warned.

"What is this?"

"You said bad things to me on the phone today. I don't like being threatened by a crazy kid."

"I didn't mean to threaten you. I just can't pay you your money right now. But I will. Meanwhile just don't bug me."

"No, Danny. Don't you bug me. I have too much at stake here. Don't tell me you're going to bring in the cops. That makes me mad."

The little gray-haired man in the black suit began to look very offensive to Danny. A thought flashed through Danny's mind. What am I doing here? He said, "Listen, I've decided to give this up. I won't rat on you. I just want out."

"Oh, no. We can still use you. It's a lot of trouble breaking in a new pusher."

"You'll have to. I'm finished."

Luftspring tensed. He had heard the footsteps first. Now Danny heard them. Running. And there was Sandra followed by a panting, sweating Sergeant Russell Cobb. He was wearing a flannel dressing gown and slippers which made him seem even more vulnerable against Luftspring's gun.

Cobb stepped in front of the boy.

"Stay behind me," he said.

Luftspring's face got red. "Get lost, Cobb. This is strictly between me and the kid."

"He's right. Get out of here," Danny said.

Cobb's voice was harsh. "Don't move, Danny."

He walked slowly toward Luftspring who said, "I'm not fooling, Cobb. Keep back."

The panic in his voice made the first shot inevitable. It struck Cobb in the chest. He paused, then moved ahead. Three more bullets pounded into Cobb's massive body before he reached Luftspring who stood now, hypnotized, as though suddenly confronted by an elephant. Cobb took the man's gun arm, twisted it until it snapped. Luftspring screamed and the gun clattered to the pavement.

Danny ran and picked up the gun just as Cobb sank to his knees, then slowly rolled onto his side.

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A uniformed cop came running into the alley, his revolver drawn. Danny handed him Luftspring's gun and joined Sandra who was kneeling beside the huge bulk of Cobb's body.

His eyes were open. He spoke to Sandra. "Connie," he whispered, "make your brother be good."

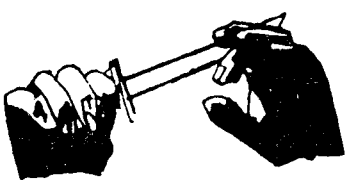
"What?" Danny said.

Sandra jabbed Danny with her elbow. "Yes," she said to Cobb, "I will. Don't worry, I will." She put her hand on his forehead.

He smiled and closed his eyes.

Sneakered feet pounded on the pavement and Ginko was suddenly there, having run all the way from Carlo's. He had a can of beer in his hand, which was against the law. He leaned over Danny and Sandra to get a good look.

"Hey," he said, "they shot the Pig. The Pig is dead."



NEXT MONTH...

13 NEW stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Interpol)*

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AGATHA CHRISTIE *(about Hercule Poirot)*

J. J. MARRIC-JOHN CREASEY *(about Gideon)*

ELLERY QUEEN *(about E.Q.)*

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

Lillian de la Torre tells us that the character named Sir Francis Flashwood, in her new Dr. Sam: Johnson story titled "The Westcombe Witch," was suggested by the character of a real-life person, "Hell Fire Francis" Dashwood (1708-1781); and that the germ of the story's plot derived from the raffish career and cabalistic trappings of Dashwood, with his ruined Abbey at Medmenham which sheltered blasphemous "monks" and "nuns," with his erotic and exotic garden, his curious church tower, his rumored Black Masses and diabolic doings, his Indian "puckrel," and his beautiful, wild daughter. The events of Miss de la Torre's story — the shenanigans, as she calls them — are strictly her fictional contribution to the real-life legend. Thus "Hell Fire Francis" Dashwood of West Wycombe becomes Sir Francis Flashwood of Westcombe in another impressive detection in the criminological career of that "learned critick and great lexicographer," Dr. Sam: Johnson. . .

THE WESTCOMBE WITCH

(as told by James Boswell, Dorset, September 1768)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

THE COVEN
A Pindarick Ode
In Honour of
Miss Fanny Flashwood

By One of Them

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Hecate, arise! Assist me while I sing!
Weird Sisters three, approach and tread the Ring!
Cybele join the Round, and *Proserpine*
To praise your sister *Fan*, propitiously incline!

"Abrummagem effusion!" remarked Dr. Sam: Johnson, the learned critick. "Well, sir, what flower of fancy comes next?"

I continued to read: "Her *Coven* we— Pray, sir, what is a coven?"

The great lexicographer answered readily: "The followers of a witch. What, is Miss Fanny Flashwood then a witch?" he added with a smile.

"Miss Fanny Flashwood is so reputed," assented our friend Mr. Ashton seriously.

'Twas the warm September of the year 1768, and with my friend and mentor, Dr. Sam: Johnson, *detector* of crime and chicane, I had come to visit the South coast. Our host was good old Mr. Azariah Ashton, late of His Majesty's landwaiters,* in his snug retreat in the seaside village of Westcombe. To start off our sojourn with éclat, he had this evening fetched us to tread a minuet at the local assembly.

The scene of the coming revels was the upper room at the old half-timbered inn called the Admiral's Head; but before ever we entered the place, we came upon the Ode to Miss Fan, writ large in a fair hand, and tacked upon the outside of the door.

"You must know," pursued little old Ashton, his nutcracker countenance wrinkling with relish, "Miss Fanny is a great heiress, and the lads are after her like flies after honey. They call themselves 'the Coven' in her honour. Sir Francis Flashwood at the Abbey is a man of money; his father amassed it in the French trade, and Miss Fan will have it all."

"But a witch!" smiled Johnson. "To take a witch with the bundle!"

"I don't deny," said Ashton, "that the Squire is up to queer doings at the Abbey, if folk say true. They call him 'Hell Fire Francis.' There's orgies in the ruins, and the Black Mass is celebrated, they do say, in the caves, and the Devil himself has been seen in the deer park, and what is done in the Witch's Round

*British customs officers who collected import duties, etc.

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on Hoy Head in the dark of the moon, I'd rather not know—"

"Sir," said I, "you raise my curiosity."

"Subdue it, sir, there are dark matters afoot at the Abbey. Yet Miss Fan is a beauty, and an heiress, and a lass of salt and fire—"

"Say no more!" I cried. "I'll have her!"

Rising twenty-eight, newly admitted to the bar in Scotland, I was ready to settle down, and was ranging England, Scotland, and Ireland in search of a wife. Why not a beautiful heiress of Dorset?

"How can I view this paragon?" I demanded.

"Nothing is easier," replied Mr. Ashton, "for here she comes."

I threw myself into a genteel attitude, the better to shew my assets—a good leg, a face well enough tho' swarthy and long in the nose, a figure not tall but well set up, adorned for the festivities in a suit of plum-coloured brocade and ruffles of Spanish lace. As I took my stance, a crested coach drew up at the inn door, and Sir Francis Flashwood descended.

"Hell Fire Francis" was well fitted to raise the Devil, if indeed that was his pleasure—tall, spare, with countenance deeply lined and black brows quirking upward in perpetual quiz. I noted no more, for extending sinewy fingers he handed down—

Miss Fanny Flashwood. Of her what shall I say? She was tall like her father, but soft and round where he was hard and spare, gently clad in leaf-green, gold-embroidered tissue that clipped her slender waist and swelled out over a wide hoop. Her upswept hair was unpowdered, and shone fiery red in the torchlight. Her milk-white face was delicately modelled, her bee-stung lip laughed, and her shining eyes were green as the sea.

While I stood staring, a dozen stalwart young men surged about her, clamouring their greetings. Yet the one who did not clamour claimed her, a well knit youth with a handsome unmoved face whose still smile revealed wide-set sharp-looking teeth in a thin-lipped mouth.

"The Honourable Mr. Thomas Talley," murmured Mr. Ashton, "Sir Francis' nephew."

For a moment the fellow stood holding his cousin's white hand and smiling into her green eyes. Then the surging youths bore the pair with them into the inn, and I was left gaping on the step.

Thus did I first glimpse Miss Fanny Flashwood, the Witch of Westcombe, surrounded by her Coven.

Tho' little Mr. Ashton as a meer landwaiter did not move in the

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Flashwood circle, the fame of my learned companion soon brought us an invitation to visit the Abbey.

For this event, my burly friend attired his majestick form in mulberry broadcloth and clean cambrick ruffles, and clapped a well combed brown scratch-wig above his strong-cut countenance. I was decent in chestnut brown, and little Ashton in mouse grey, and so we presented ourselves for tea at the Abbey.

The tea was well enough, the best Bohea, and Miss Fan, clad in coppery shot silk from France, presided at the urn like a queen. But it was the tour of the grounds that provided so much matter for astonishment.

Sir Francis Flashwood had been busy adorning his domain, and we followed him agape from the Grecian columns of his mansion to the Abbey ruins to the curious church tower to the mouth of the caves to the Roman garden and then back to the mansion again.

The ruins of the antient Abbey had been extended and made habitable. The "ruined tower," indeed, with its greenery-filled crannies, was totally the work of Sir Francis' stonemasons, only by art seeming to moulder. The truly antient refectory had been roofed over anew, and the monks' cells flanking the crumbling arches of the cloister were weather-tight. In one I glimpsed a luxurious bed. I wondered much what "nuns" might shelter there. Over all, a painted motto from Rabelais commanded: "*Fay ce que voudras.*" "Do what you please."

The church on the hill, where once, it is said, stood a heathen shrine, had been rebuilt according to Sir Francis' rather eccentrick fantasy. Atop the tower rose, not a spire or a cross, but a gilded ball. It was reached by a narrow iron ladder from the tower. When we swarmed up, clinging to the swaying chains that served for support, we came through a trap door onto a circular floor perhaps twelve feet across. Unglazed windows looked eight ways. Landward stretched the tree tops of Carnock Chase. In the seaward window was set a spyglass, by which we could look across woods and meadows to Hoy Head, and beyond Hoy Cove to the open sea, where a pretty bark was coming in with white sails swelling.

"Make haste, gentlemen, we have much to see," said Sir Francis abruptly, and we descended again.

"And the caves, Sir Francis?" I urged him.

"The caves, Mr. Boswell? Oh, the chalk pit. There the chalk was

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mined to pave the harbour road, d'ye see, sir. There's nothing inside save hollows in the chalk. Walk this way, you shall see the entrance. So ugly was the gash, I have masked it."

He had masked it indeed, with solemn "ruined" arches, new built of grey flint, under the night-dark yew trees. I longed for a peep inside—was there a sable-draped altar with reversed cross and black candles upon it?—but was given no opportunity to see. Sir Francis led us back towards the house along the edge of the deep park.

Handing Miss Fan, I yet kept a sharp eye for any appearance of the Devil. Once I thought I glimpsed him in a tree; but on second glance there was only the wind in the leaves. Then I spied a presence on the ground; but that was no Devil neither, only a gamekeeper. The fellow had a bull's hide waistcoat and an ill-favoured countenance, with a desperate bony jaw and hairy brows meeting over a needle-sharp nose. He sketched a grudging salute as we passed.

"Laggett, my keeper," said Sir Francis, "he does wonders with my outlandish *flora* and *fauna*, imported from India."

I own my attention, fixed upon my lovely companion, wandered from her father's discourse, which touched on the *datura*, a dream-making plant, and among the *fauna* a certain noteworthy specimen of the simian kind.

Then we came to the Roman garden. In the statuary here Sir Francis had expressed a host of exotick fantasies. A naked marble Venus was bending over to take a thorn from her foot: a most unseemly sight, at which Dr. Johnson snorted.

In a grotto a cock was crowing and a Carmelite was laughing in glee at their proverbial amatory prowess. Nearby, a satyr had overtaken a nymph, and a Latin inscription made a bawdy pun: PENI TENTO NON PENITENTI. By this time Dr. Johnson was thoroughly scandalized, and made off without further ado, followed by Mr. Ashton, whose ears were red, and perforce by our host, still discoursing of his Indian specimens. To my great delight I was left alone with Miss Fan, who seemed nothing loath.

We seated ourselves on a marble bench against the boxwood hedge. Beside us a statue of Priapus was adorned in a manner I thought hardly suitable for the young lady, but she paid it no heed. Resolving to improve the opportunity, I took her soft hand and breathed passion. I was quite the Sicilian swain, and my nymph was so gracious I quickly put my fortune to the test.

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"Dear sorceress," said I earnestly, "I most eagerly desire to make one in your Coven, and I entreat you'll account me of the number."

I meant no more than to be admitted of her train; but she took it otherwise.

"You shall attend the next Sabbat," said she, smiling, "if you are not afraid."

"Try me!" said I boldly; tho' truth to tell I knew myself susceptible to impression, and how I should behave if in the Witch's Round I came face to face with the Old Scratch himself, I could not foresee.

But the Westcombe Witch did not doubt me. We shook hands on the bargain, and so left Priapus leering in the hedge, and walked sedately up to the house after our elders.

'Twas now only a matter of awaiting the next gathering of the Coven. Whether it would prove to be only a rustick revel, or whether the green-eyed witch would in fact pay homage to Beelzebub, I could not decide. I awaited the summons. It did not come. Michaelmas approached, and with it the end of our visit.

When twilight fell on Michaelmas Eve, something was seen to be astir. Dusky shapes began to pass our garden gate, making for the Abbey. They wore dark cloaks, and—I perceived with a *frisson*—their faces were blackened. The Sabbat! And I had been invited!

I knew not what Dr. Johnson would say; but why ask? With our host he was safely ensconced by the parlour fire, brewing a bason of punch. In the kitchen I hastily burnt a cork, applied it, tied back my hair with a thong, viewed my Ethiopian countenance in the bottom of a copper pot, threw my cloak about me, and made for the Abbey.

Inside the grounds, dark shapes were gathering. I saw that they were making for the cave. Silently in the dusk I followed, into the wood, and under the arches of the entrance. Inside, the cavern smelt brackish. Drops of water fell with measured sound from the dusky vault above. Smoky torchlight thickened the air, and flickered on dark-clad figures and blackened faces. By the entrance stood a slim boy, all in black from neck to toe. The uncertain light caught fiery gleams from red hair clubbed at the nape—red hair—?

"What, Mr. Boswell," came the laughing voice, "you come to our Sabbat after all?"

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Someone behind her rapped out an oath, and beside her "Hell Fire" Francis, sable clad, exclaimed:

"This is too bad of you, Mr. Boswell. What have you to do here? Take him home, Laggett."

The burly gamekeeper gripped my arm. Was I to be cheated of the experience after all? But the lady intervened.

"Stay, Laggett, the night is young yet, we may *initiate* Mr. Boswell, and I'll take care of him thereafter. Do, father, I have a fancy to see what he's made of, and no harm shall come by him, I promise you."

The idea was acclaimed by Miss Fan's Coven of young fellows.

"Do, uncle, let us have him," drawled Talley with his frozen smile.

"We'll initiate him, I warrant you," grunted a rustical lad at his elbow.

"Well, well, Fan, have your way," said Sir Francis, suppressing a smile. "You can manage him, no doubt. There's time yet, and you may follow on."

Laggett loosed me with a grin, and melted into the gloom. The Witch turned her green eyes to me.

"Are you afraid?"

I was; but I would not say so. Dark figures were moving deeper into the cave; but the Coven stood by. In a trice I was hoodwinked with a vast black neckerchief. It smelt vilely of barnacles. I was propelled down a rough slope, and thus began an adventure from which I came home dripping wet, with my head in a whirl.

There was still a light in the parlour when I crept in, as I had departed, by the kitchen door. In the fitful light from the hearth-fire, the same copper pot showed me my plight: lank hair dripping, face washed clean in the highlights and still murky with burnt cork in the hollows.

"Well, Mr. Boswell," came my friend's voice from the inner door, "where have you been, and what have you done, to come home in this pickle?"

"I went to the Sabbat," I muttered.

Our host, beside him, uttered an ejaculation. It sounded like a prayer. He bustled about me solicitously, pressing upon me a mighty dram of strong waters, fetching his own voluminous flannel bedgown to warm me. Dr. Johnson planted himself on the settle by the fire, and demanded my story.

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"Well, sir, the Coven undertook to initiate me, that I might become fit to attend the Sabbat. Miss took my hand, sir, and never let it go through thick and thin, and so I endured."

"Endured what, sir?"

"First, I swore an oath, sir, if ever I tattled I desired the Devil might carry me off, body and bones, toenails and tripes. . .*et caetera*," I faltered, swallowing. "I'll say no more."

But my mentor feared neither man nor the Devil (tho' our host appeared to fear both), and his determination overrode my reluctance. I went on:

"Then, sir, being become one of them, I was released from the blindfold. I found myself in a commodious room dug in the chalk. Torches in standards gave light. In an alcove stood a blackened altar, incised with strange symbols and lighted by a pair of black candles. Before it rose the ever-smiling Talley, wearing a vestment like a carter's smock. He presided over the ceremony as I was baptized anew with—with unholy water, most noisome; ask me no further on that head."

"By what name, sir?" asked my friend curiously.

"Brimstone," I mumbled.

"And then?"

"And then, sir, I was dubbed."

"Dubbed, sir?" asked little Ashton, fetching more brandy.

"Dubbed knight, sir. With a dung fork. The whole Coven shared in the dubbing. My shoulder is sore." I wriggled it tentatively. Nothing seemed to be broken.

"And we are to call you—"

"Sir Brimstone of Tophet." I had to grin at that. "After—further ceremonies"—I gulped and rushed on—"there ensued the Black Mass they tell of."

"Go on."

I called back the scene to memory, the smoky light flickering on the blackened faces, the cabbalistick gestures and frozen smile of the celebrant, cousin Talley.

"Well, sir, we all bowed low, but in reverse, presenting our posteriors to the altar. Talley mumbled from a black-bound book—I think he was reading it backwards. He made magical passes, and consecrated a turnip."

"A what, sir?"

"A turnip, sir. We all bowed again, and the Devil appeared."

"O come, Mr. Boswell."

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"I assure you, sir, there was a mighty clanking of chains, and the Devil leaped up upon the altar. He hunkered down and ate the consecrated turnip, with long black fingernails and teeth like a shark. My head swam. When I looked again, the Devil was gone, and Sir Francis Flashwood was standing on the altar step. Enough, he said, be off, the Sabbat awaits us. Hastily Talley blessed us with an upside-down benediction. The entire Coven seized torches from the standards and followed Sir Francis into the inner recesses of the cave."

"And did you also follow?"

"Well, sir, you may suppose that these events had agitated the tender bosom of the young lady. She clung to me, sir, and I—ah, comforted her. Before her agitation was soothed, I know not what length of time passed; but suddenly we became aware that the Coven had left us behind. Torch in hand, we hastened on to the banks of Styx—"

"Well, sir, *hac iter ad impia Tartara mittit*, that is the way to the under world," smiled my friend. "Was Charon there to ferry you?"

"No, sir, 'tis an underground water course they call Styx, by which they sail to the Sabbat."

"In a sieve?"

"May be, sir. When we reached the murky bank, all boats were gone save one crazy shallop, most like a sieve indeed. In this we made shift to embark. Scarce had I begun to ply the pole, however, when the young lady, terrified anew by I know not what, flung her arms about me, lost the torch in the water, and overset the boat. 'Twas my luck that the stream was shallow.

"Well, sir, what were we to do? Our hope of following to the Sabbat sank with the boat. Dripping wet, we crept back towards the light of the two black candles, and so out into the grounds of the Abbey. There I looked to be invited in; but no such thing—my fair companion pushed me out at the little foot door beside the gate, and peremptorily bade me go home to bed."

"Sage advice, after all that horse play."

"Horse play! Nay, sir, could you have seen that diabolic rout with their blackened faces—"

"Blackened faces!" Dr. Johnson put up his brows and little Ashton sucked in his breath, as they exchanged a look.

"Why were we not told of this?" demanded Johnson. "On with dry breeches, Bozzy. I've a mind to attend this Sabbat after all."

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"How then? The boats are all gone."

"Above ground. Come, your breeches."

Mr. Ashton, horrified at our daring, barred the street door and retired to bed, leaving us to depart inconspicuously by the kitchen and the garden gate. We slipped in at the Abbey postern. Nothing was stirring in the grounds, and the mansion lay dark. A waning moon was rising.

From the cave mouth we went on through the wood, following what I remembered of the passages beneath. Where I guessed Styx to run, we angled off on rising ground, and so came out in the open on Hoy Head. No one was to be seen there, but a hum of voices told us we were nearing the scene of the Sabbat.

"Down, sir," muttered my friend. "We must not be detected."

Prone, we worked our way through rough stems and grasses to the edge of the bluff, and looked over.

Below us, on Hoy Cove, the Coven and a host of black-face followers were active as ants around an ant-hill. They were not conjuring up the Old Scratch. They were prosaically busy unloading a fleet of small boats and carrying the freight up the side of a sturdy coasting vessel lying at anchor in the cove. I saw kegs—"French brandy," muttered Dr. Johnson—bales—"French silks"—japanned boxes—"China tea"—to such a smuggler's fortune is Miss Fan an heiress!

And there was Miss Fan herself, in a red hunting coat, astride a tall bay horse; and beside her, mounted too, Sir Francis Flashwood and Mr. Thomas Talley directed operations.

The better to view Miss Fan, fetching in her tight buckskin breeches, I edged forward. A stone dislodged, and rolled down the steep incline. Blackened faces turned upward, there was a shout, and several of the band made for the long zigzag path that snaked up the bluff.

"Run!" said my intrepid friend, adding grimly, "for your life!"

Nimbly, considering his bulk, he led the way. Our feet pounded along the path through the wood. We had passed the cave mouth, and were skirting the deer park, when we heard them shouting on the headland. Twigs cracked under running feet on the wood path, and lent us wings. We stumbled through the postern, crossed the road, gained our garden, tumbled in at the kitchen door, and drove the bolt home.

"Quick, Mr. Boswell, your nightcap." He was up the stair and cramming on his own. "Your bedgown!" He was out of his

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breeches and into his own gown. I followed suit as a mighty summons began to sound on the front door.

"What shall I do?" wailed our host, appearing in his shirt. "They are desperate men, they'll kill us all!"

"Go to bed, and leave this to me," said Johnson resolutely. "I'll deal with them, I warrant you."

The front door cracked alarmingly under the battering. Johnson put back the shutter and thrust his head out at window.

"Leave off your noise, you scoundrels!" he cried sharply. "The household's asleep. What's the mighty matter that you raise such a pother?"

Our pursuers looked up. 'Twas the grim gamekeeper Laggett headed the posse. He growled something about poachers and trespassers.

"Be off, man, you know we are neither," commanded Johnson.

"Then they are sheltering here," snarled Laggett, and resumed his tattoo on the door.

I heard no sound of hooves on the chalk roadway, but suddenly three horses were at the gate.

"Muffled with leather," muttered Johnson.

Three faces took the faint moonlight—Sir Francis', Mr. Talley's, Miss Fan's.

"That will do, Laggett, be off," said Sir Francis. The understrappers withdrew.

"You, sir *(to Johnson)*, bid Mr. Boswell come down."

"I am here, Sir Francis," said I over my friend's shoulder.

"You have put your long nose into our affairs this night, Mr. Boswell. I strongly counsel you to keep your tongue between your teeth hereafter."

"Be at ease, father," struck in Miss Fan. "Mr. Boswell suffered things, and did things, this night in the cave, that he would not chuse to have told."

"That is true," I muttered.

"As long as he is silent—and no longer—so are we."

I heard this outrageous bargain proposed by that bee-stung lip with revulsion. Yet I knew she spoke true.

"I am not likely to blab," I granted unwillingly.

"So, sir," said Dr. Johnson blandly, "Mr. Boswell is muzzled. But who will muzzle *me?*"

Three heads jerked up. He stood four-square in the casement, magisterial in spite of the nightcap.

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"Yes, sir, I know the secret of Styx, and by my own eyes, not Mr. Boswell's. If you would have *me* be silent, hear my terms. My friend Ashton goes unmolested; and you, Sir Francis, you will see to it that smuggled goods are no longer hidden on Styx."

"I know not what you refer to," said Sir Francis frostily.

"Put it how you will, sir, so the traffick ceases. And you, Miss, smuggling is no trade for a lady. Give it over."

"I shall, sir," smiled Miss Fan, "for I have given my hand to Tom here, and once wed, he decrees it, no more night riding."

"Give you joy, Mr. Talley," said Dr. Johnson.

Talley bowed in the saddle, his frozen smile softening. I would have wished joy, but the words stuck in my throat.

"Goodnight, Sir Brimstone!" the laughing voice floated back to me as the horses moved off silent-footed.

"So, sir," said I over the breakfast tea tray, "Sir Francis is but a common smuggler, no diabolist, and there was never a Black Mass in the cave—"

"I did not say that, sir," said Johnson. "Sir Francis is a man of many talents; he is not called 'Hell Fire Francis' for nothing. Of course there have been Black Masses in the cave. Why otherwise the altar, the cabbalistick adornments, the black candles, all so ready to hand? But I knew very quickly that what was done to you was no genuine Black Mass, but meer horse play, designed to fright you into keeping silence."

BOSWELL: And Miss overset the boat o' purpose?

JOHNSON: To keep you away from the smugglers' 'Sabbat,' that is true.

BOSWELL: And I dreamed the Devil on the altar? A *datura* dream perhaps?

JOHNSON: No, sir. The 'Devil' was real. We glimpsed him in a tree in the deer park. 'Tis a baboon, a most intelligent beast, of whom Sir Francis was bragging all the way to the house 'tother day. His name is Puckrel. I daresay the gamekeeper fetched Puckrel into the cave on his chain, and loosed him at the appropriate moment, of purpose to affright you.

BOSWELL: But how did you know that smuggling was toward?

JOHNSON: By the blackened faces. 'Tis smugglers black their faces. Witches go nude to the Sabbat.

BOSWELL: How come you, sir, to be so instructed in the Black Arts?

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JOHNSON: By reading King James his Daemonologie—Olympiodorus—and the rest. But no matter, the Devil is not in it, save as he tempted Sir Francis to turn smuggler.

BOSWELL: Yet you let him go free.

JOHNSON: I am no catchpoll, sir. But if he persists I shall certainly denounce him.

BOSWELL: But why do they play at witchcraft while working at smuggling?

ASHTON: To affright the country folk, and keep them at home while the smugglers are abroad.

BOSWELL: And why send the smuggled goods boating on Styx?

ASHTON: The caves of Westcombe are sea caves, sir. Mining chalk was only Sir Francis' pretext for making the natural caves more commodious for his purposes. Styx is an arm of the sea, giving on the harbour on one side, and on Hoy Cove on the other. Thus may the Coven unload a French vessel in deep water, hide the laden boats on Styx, and come out on the Cove side at their leisure, to load the smuggled goods again on a coasting vessel for distribution. 'Tis safer than pack horses. —Dr. Johnson, your cup is empty (*pouring*).

BOSWELL: You seem knowledgeable in these matters, Mr. Ashton.

ASHTON: Of course I am, sir. Was not I formerly a landwaiter with His Majesty's Customs? And who has not heard of the Westcombe Blacks?

JOHNSON: *(setting down his cup)* Well, well, sir, they'll be heard of no more, I warrant you.

BOSWELL: And thus, sir, have you once more rendered a publick service by your art of *detection;* tho' we are not to brag of it.

JOHNSON: *(smiling)* And thus have *you*, 'Sir Brimstone of Tophet,' fortunately escaped a matrimonial alliance with THE WESTCOMBE WITCH.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JOSH PACHTER

Not unnaturally, a spate of skyjacking stories has been submitted to EQMM recently. Here is the Josh Pachter version of the problem. . .

SKYJACK

by JOSH PACHTER

I put my loaded automatic flat on the bottom of the duplicate camera bag and fitted the false bottom snugly into place over it. Then I opened a copy of the Manhattan telephone directory at random, closed my eyes, and stabbed a pencil at a right-hand page. The listing I came up with was for Midgelay, D.L., 3061 East 87th Street.

Printing in sterile block letters, I filled in Midgelay's name and address on the lines of the small identification card that had come with the camera bag, and slid the card under the clear plastic window of the leather tag that was attached to the bag's shoulder strap.

Finally I loaded the bag with cameras, filters, extra lenses, cans of film, and other photographic equipment. When I set it next to the other bag, the one labeled with my own name and address, it was impossible to tell them apart without checking the name tags. I picked them both up, and found that the gun in the Midgelay case made almost no noticeable difference in weight.

Satisfied, I stashed the two bags under my bed, then poured myself a shot of bourbon and let it melt its way slowly down my throat. I was ready for another shot, but there was one more chore to take care of first.

I looked up the number of the Southern Airlines terminal out at Kennedy in the Yellow Pages, picked up the phone, and dialed. The connection was bad, which suited me fine—less

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chance of my voice being remembered.

"I'd like to make a reservation to Miami," I told the girl who answered.

"Yes, sir. When will you be traveling?"

"A week from today. On December twentieth."

"The twentieth. Would you prefer a morning, afternoon, or evening flight, sir?"

I paused, letting her think I was pondering. "I guess afternoon would be best. Do you have a flight around one?"

"I'll see what we have available, sir. Can you hold for a moment, please?" She fed the information into her computer, then came back with a reply. "We do have space available on our Flight Number 16, departing New York at 1:35, arriving Miami 4:18."

I smiled. "Yes, that would be fine."

"Good. Will you be traveling first class or coach, sir?"

"Coach."

"Right. May I have your name, please?"

"Midgelay," I told her. "M-I-D-G-E-L-A-Y."

"First initial?"

"D."

"Okay, Mr. Midgelay, you're confirmed on Southern Airlines Flight 16, leaving JFK at 1:35 on December 20th, arriving at Miami International Airport at 4:18. Will you be needing a return reservation?"

"No," I said slowly. "No, I won't."

The girl asked for a local phone number where I could be reached, and I gave her the Midgelay listing in the directory. Then she told me, yes, I could pick up my ticket at any travel agency. I let her thank me for flying Southern, and then I broke the connection.

The first step of my plan was now complete. Smiling, I kicked off my shoes and reached for the bourbon bottle.

Step Two broke up the morning and most of the afternoon of December 15th.

Making each purchase at a different store in a different part of town, I bought a pair of tinted nonprescription contact lenses, a bottle of hair dye, and a pair of elevator shoes. An hour later, back home in my bathroom, had me ready and, an inch taller and with different colored hair and eyes, I visited the Park Avenue offices of Carousel Travel.

I paid cash for the plane ticket, as I had for everything else I'd bought that day. My own tickets had been paid for by check, a week earlier, at a travel agency more than twenty blocks away.

By 3:30 I had disposed of

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the contact lenses, shoes, and the rest of the bottle of dye. After a quick cup of coffee uptown I went home again and finally managed to rinse my hair back to its original color.

Then I dropped D. L. Midgelay's plane ticket into an ashtray and touched a match to it. When it was burned I stirred up the ashes and flushed them down the toilet.

Which left me with nothing more to do until December 20th.

I checked my suitcase with a skycap in front of the terminal and reached the departure gate of Flight 16 an hour before flight time. After checking in, I left my camera bag under one of the chairs in the waiting area, draping my coat over it to hide it from view.

Then I went back to the long-term parking lot, took the Midgelay camera bag from the trunk compartment of my car, and returned to the terminal.

It was more than thirty minutes before my flight was due to leave, and the departure area was crowded. I managed to snag the chair next to my coat, and set the Midgelay camera bag beside me on the floor.

As I waited out the last few minutes before boarding, I went over the details of my plan for the last time.

I would attempt to carry the Midgelay bag, the bag with the gun concealed beneath the false bottom, on board. When the metal detectors the airlines are using these days registered as I passed through, the security guards would make me open up the bag. I hoped that the photographic gear would account for the detectors' reaction, and they would pass me through.

However, if the guards decided to search further and discovered the gun, all I had to do was act shocked and innocent. Somebody would be sure to notice the name tag, at which point I'd snap my fingers and say I must have picked up the wrong camera bag by mistake. We'd check the waiting area and find out that, sure enough, my bag was under that chair there and, yeah, they *do* look just alike.

Further investigation would reveal that there was in fact a D. L. Midgelay ticketed on Flight 16, and that Midgelay was now nowhere to be found.

So they'd have to figure that this Midgelay character was the skyjacker, not me, that I'd picked up his bag accidentally, and that when he'd realized what had happened, he'd panicked and taken off.

So either way I'd be in the clear. If they passed me through

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I could go ahead with the rest of my plan; if they stopped me it would mean going back to the drawing board, but at least it would be my drawing board, not one in a corner of a prison cell somewhere.

Sure, I was taking a lot of precautions, but they'd all pay off if anything happened to go wrong.

Nothing did.

When they starting boarding a few minutes later, I picked up the Midgelay bag and got on line. As I walked between the two tall metal poles, the electronic detectors registered. A guard opened the bag, fiddled with one or two of the cameras inside, nodded briefly, and waved me on.

The plane was a DC-10, one of those jumbo jets that seats 40 people up in first class and another 200 or so in coach. It was full, what with the Christmas rush, but due to the last-minute nonappearance of one D. L. Midgelay, whose camera bag I stowed under my seat, at least one standby was lucky enough to be taken on board.

We took off at two o'clock, 25 minutes late. At 2:15 I unbuckled my seat belt and carried the Midgelay bag to the lavatories in the rear of the plane. There were four johns, and the narrow window above each doorknob read OCCUPIED. I waited. A few minutes passed. Then one of the signs flashed VACANT as the door swung open and an old woman in a print dress pushed past me and shuffled up the aisle toward her seat. I took her place in the john.

Inside, I unloaded the camera bag and loosened the false bottom. My gun was there, loaded and ready. I slipped it into the side pocket of my corduroy sports coat.

After a glance in the mirror to make sure the gun didn't bulge too noticeably, I reloaded the camera gear back into the bag, left the lavatory, and proceeded to the front of the plane, stowing the bag in the overhead rack above my seat as I passed by.

Two stewardesses stood by the cockpit door, talking.

"I'd like to speak to the pilot," I said, smiling politely.

They looked at each other. "Passengers aren't allowed in the cockpit during the flight, sir," the older one told me. According to the wings on her pale-blue uniform blazer, her name was Claire. "But I'd be happy to give him a message for you."

I angled my body so that none of the passengers would be able to see the gun when I

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pulled it halfway out of my pocket. "I'd rather give it to him personally," I said.

The younger stewardess, who wore a metal pin that said "DEBBIE — Trainee," gasped. Claire didn't make a sound. She just stood there, staring at the gun.

"Let's go," I told them.

Slowly they moved away from the door.

I shook my head. "Uh-uh. You girls first."

Debbie's lower lip started to tremble.

"Move it, honey," I said gruffly. "Just behave yourself and stay nice and quiet and you won't get hurt. Otherwise—" I shrugged.

With an angry glance at me Claire took Debbie's arm, whispered something soothing, and walked her into the cockpit. I followed, shutting the door behind me and drawing my gun in one motion.

"Frank," the older stewardess said. Her voice was tight. "He has a gun."

Three men whirled to face us. I'd done my homework and knew who they were: pilot, copilot, flight engineer.

"A loaded gun," I added. "Six bullets. That's one for each of you and one for good luck. Any of you guys feel like being heroes, why don't you get it over with now?"

The pilot licked his lips. "No heroes," he said. "We'll do whatever you say."

"You're a smart boy, Frank," I nodded. "Make sure you stay smart."

He swallowed noisily. "Where do you want to go?"

I grinned. "Back to New York."

His head jerked up. "What!"

"You heard me, Frank. We're going back to New York."

He blinked his eyes. "But—why?" he stammered.

I leveled my gun at him. "Do it, Frank," I said. "No questions."

His eyes still blinking, he turned back to his instrument panel.

Ten minutes later he faced me again. "I'll have to radio in for permission to land."

I raised my eyebrows. "Who said anything about landing, Frank?"

"You want to hold up here?"

I nodded.

"But we're at 30,000 feet. Do you want to stay up this high?"

"What's normal holding altitude?" I asked.

"Usually somewhere between 6000 and 15,000 feet."

"Get down there, then."

He paused, looking at me

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steadily. "I've got to radio in and get assigned a specific altitude first."

I considered it. "Okay," I said finally, "go ahead and do it. Tell them you've been skyjacked. Tell them I'm pointing a gun at your head."

Frank looked at me nervously. "What else?"

My eyebrows lifted again. "Nothing else."

"Aren't you going to make a ransom demand?"

Ignoring him, I turned to the flight engineer. "You," I said, "pass me your headset. I want to listen in on this conversation."

"Aren't you going to make a ransom demand?" Frank repeated.

By 3:15 we were circling over Long Island at 8000 feet. I'd had Claire get on the P.A. and tell the passengers we were going back to Kennedy because of mechanical difficulties, that there was no danger, and we were just waiting for clearance to land.

It was crowded, with the six of us inside the small cockpit. Frank and the copilot and flight engineer, whose names I didn't bother to ask, were in their chairs, facing away from me. Claire and Debbie were sitting on the floor, the older woman trying to keep the girl calm and quiet. I was leaning against the door, covering them all with my gun.

At 3:30 I said, "Okay, Frank, here we go. Radio your control tower that I want the president of Southern Airlines waiting for us at the airport. As soon as we get word he's there, you can bring the plane down. Then he comes on board, *alone*, to deliver the ransom money."

Frank nodded. "How much?"

I said it slowly. "Five thousand dollars."

Debbie started to giggle.

"*Five* thousand?" The copilot frowned. "Are you kidding?"

I pointed the gun at him. "Does it look like I'm kidding?"

There was a silence. Then Frank picked up his hand mike, hit the talk button, and said, "Southern Airlines 40016 calling Kennedy Tower. SA40016 to Kennedy."

He released the button and the headphones I was wearing came alive with static. It faded away, and a tinny voice squawked, "This is Kennedy, SA40016. Go ahead, please."

"Kennedy, our skyjacker has given these instructions: contact Mr. James Weston, repeat, Mr. James Weston. He is to meet us at JFK carrying five thousand dollars—"

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"Small used bills," I whispered. "Unmarked. No consecutive serial numbers."

"Five thousand dollars in small used bills. These bills are to be unmarked, and must not have consecutive serial numbers. Over."

"Clarify, please, '016," the metallic voice came back. "Did you say *five thousand* dollars?"

Frank looked at me. I nodded.

"That's right, Kennedy. Five, zero, zero, zero. Five thousand dollars. Please contact as soon as Weston arrives. Out."

"That was very good, Frank," I said, as he hung the microphone back in place. "You do good work."

He turned around and glared at me. "There's close to 300 people on board this plane," he snarled. "Those people are my responsibility, and I'm not going to let any of them get hurt. That's the only reason I'm cooperating with you, you scum."

"Just so long as you keep on cooperating," I told him softly.

There was a sound from the floor. "What—what do we do now?" Debbie was asking.

"Now," I announced, "we wait."

The radio came to life again at 4:17. "Kennedy to Southern Airlines 40016. Kennedy to SA40016. Come in, please."

Frank shot me a glance, and I nodded. He picked up the mike. "This is '016, Kennedy. Go ahead, please."

"Mr. Weston is here, '016. With the money. You are cleared for immediate landing on Runway 3. Taxi in to Gate 8. Confirm, please."

"Tell them that's fine," I ordered. "And remember, Weston comes on board *alone.*"

He pressed his talk button. "Confirming landing on Runway 3, Gate 8. Our ETA is"—he turned to the flight engineer, who checked a gauge and mouthed the words *fourteen minutes*—"1633 hours. My instructions are for Mr. Weston to board us alone, repeat, alone, carrying ransom money. Over."

"Roger, '016. He'll be there. Kennedy out."

"Okay, let's bring her down, Frank," I said. "It's almost over now."

"What about you?" Claire asked. "How do you expect to get away?"

"Thanks for caring," I chuckled. "But why don't you just let *me* do the worrying about that?"

I had Frank bring the plane to a stop about a hundred yards short of the gate and watched through the cockpit window as a well-dressed, middle-aged man

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walked from the terminal to meet us, his steel-gray hair blowing in the brisk December wind. He was carrying a small black attaché case.

"On your feet, gang," I said cheerfully, "and out to the forward exit hatch." I herded them out of the cockpit ahead of me, keeping the gun concealed in my pocket. By the time they had the hatch swung open, Weston had reached the plane. I looked out and saw him waiting some twenty feet below us and slightly off to one side.

"How's he supposed to get up here without a boarding ladder?" the copilot asked me.

"You've got an evacuation slide, don't you?"

He looked puzzled. "Well, sure, but it's just an oversized air mattress. Too smooth for anyone to climb up it."

"Weston's not coming up," I said, hitting the release handle next to the hatch. "I'm going down."

There was a whoosh of air, and a mass of brilliant orange plastic billowed away from the plane. It began to inflate, the far end settling gently on the ground.

"Here, you take this," I said, handing my gun to Frank. "I don't need it any more."

He stared at it vacantly for several seconds. And then his eyes went hard and he pointed it at my leg and squeezed the trigger. There was a loud report as it went off, but I still stood there, smiling. Frank's eyes went wide. He lifted the gun and fired straight at my stomach. There was another explosion. My smile broadened to a grin.

Frank's jaw dropped.

"Blanks," I said. Then, " 'Bye," and I jumped.

Weston was waiting at the foot of the slide. He looked unhappy, but his grip was strong as he shook my hand. "I suppose I ought to say congratulations," he scowled. "Did they at least make it tough for you?"

I shook my head. "Easy as pie."

"No one hurt?"

"Nobody, as promised. There were only five people on the whole plane who even knew it was being skyjacked."

Weston sighed. "Well, I just hope it pays off."

I brought up something I'd been wondering about ever since he'd shown up at my office two weeks ago. "You really think this will force the Washington boys to step in and take over airport security?"

"I can only hope so," Weston answered. "The amount of publicity this thing'll get should make them take *some* kind of action." His shoulders

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had slumped as he spoke, but now he drew himself up straight and said, "Let's keep our fingers crossed."

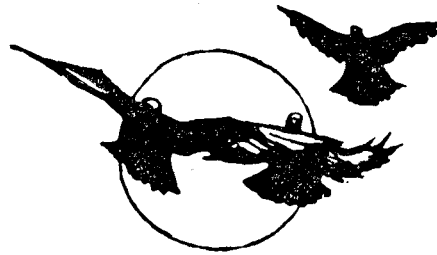
"And what about me?" I asked.

"You're clear. Ever since I first spoke to you the tower's been under orders just to notify *me* in case of any skyjacking attempt, not the police or the F.B.I. And I'll talk to the pilot and passengers. When I tell them the purpose of this stunt was to help make air travel safer for everyone in the future, I don't think anyone will want to press charges."

He sighed. "Now, then, about your fee."

"Five thousand dollars," I smiled, "as agreed, all expenses included."

"Five thousand dollars," Weston repeated. He handed me his black attaché case; then we turned and walked off together toward the terminal.



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This is the 391st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. .a subtle study of one of the great forces behind the emergence of Women's Lib — a deep look into the prison of a woman's mind, with a merging and fusion of past and present most delicately achieved. . .

The author, Kelly H. Blau, was 30 when she submitted her "first story." She is a housewife with a husband and three children and "a penchant for mysteries, murder, and mayhem" (fictional, of course). Originally from North Carolina, she was raised as an "Army brat." Now she resides in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where her husband is a retailer.

Her "first story" is a searing comment on a vital aspect of our times. . .

"WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING ALL DAY?"

by KELLY H. BLAU

With the early morning sun pouring onto the pitted formica table she could almost pretend the prison didn't exist except as a part of her imagination, that the wide ever-lengthening bars pressing across her bare arms and down the floor really were the shadowed panes of a plain kitchen window in a plain tract house. Soon her mother would call to her, "Shirley! Shirley! Do hurry, dear, or you'll be late for school!"

She smiled, remembering the elastic grip of bobbysox around her trim ankles and the scratchy wool of a bright plaid skirt against her young thighs; but instead of shiny brown loafers a pair of misshapen tennis shoes now flopped on her feet beneath the scarred chair and the plaid skirt of memory was a wilted cotton shift that sagged limply between her knees.

The coffee in the heavy mug before her was bitter from having

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been reheated from the night before. Its taste reminded her that her mother would not be calling her, that another day in this prison sentence was about to begin. Oh, they came to visit, her mother and the others. The girls, their hair fixed differently now; and the boys, too—only now without the football uniforms that had made them so exciting. They smiled and smiled at her and she had to grin back until her mouth ached.

"You look so well, Shirley!" they said. Inanities dropped with the aggravation of a leaky faucet until she finally stopped her gay pretension and convinced them to go drivel elsewhere. But now, at least, there was a moment of peace, a pinpoint of quiet before the harrassment began again.

As always, without enough warning, the alarm rang. Her teeth clenched and she had to remind herself to be careful not to ruin the orthodonture that daddy had paid for. Oh, God! That screeching bell! She could not ignore it. She washed her cup at the sink and filled a pail. The floor must be scrubbed first. It must shine and gleam so that you could eat from it, they said. The Man liked it that way. If it didn't glow he would look at her with a slight twist of his cruel mouth and say, "Well, Shirley, what have you been doing all day?"

Push the mop. Wring it out. The women on television did it. Push it until the floor is spotless. Intermittently the bell rang. It would continue to ring until it was obeyed. Another order, another question. What have you been doing this morning? You are expected to participate! You must! Chain yourself to the oven until your face is raw from the heat and bake cookies and cakes until you retch with the sick sweetness. Jab your fingers with a thousand needles until your blood splotches over the stiff denim of unending piles of tattered dungarees that must be mended. Set up the padded board and iron, Shirley. Wrinkles and creases are forbidden here. It does not matter if your knees have locked in an agony of exhaustion. Everything must be cleaned and pressed. It is your duty, Shirley.

Dear Lord, I am too young to be here!

Far away the wailing began. Low, keening, rising now to the pitch of an air-raid siren. Come! Obey me!

But the floor must shine first! Hurry! Push the filthy mop for one last sweep, then put it away and answer the screaming.

The room now, and the screaming muffled not at all by the closed door. Open it, Shirley. It does not look like a cell. There are

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bright curtains and a brightly colored rug. On the bed the guard with the baby face that she sees in her dreams. So sweet, that face; her young heart had taken to it from the beginning and loved it. She had thought that here, at last, was the one who would comfort her in this place, perhaps even be her escape. But behind the child features was a meanness that delighted in thinking of ways to debase her. Bathe me, slave! Feed me and never act as though you do not enjoy every second.

Mutely she did the baby's bidding until he was content at last. His fondness for the bottle was a weakness she had quickly learned to use. With the warm liquid soothing his belly, he stared drunkenly from her to the ceiling and back again as he cooed unintelligible nonsense. She felt the bile rise in her throat at his helplessness, knowing he would demand again and again and that she must answer. His gurgling laugh pursued her down the hall.

Back to the safety of the kitchen now that he was satisfied. Perhaps she could steal a cup of tea before they remembered her. Just a tiny minute of respite. She waited for the water to boil and idled quietly to the window. The world was out there. Occasionally she had been able to see the normal people—calm, happy, everyday people who did not know and could not understand the woman held prisoner in this place. Today there was only an old man walking a black dog. The animal strained and pulled against the leash. Poor beast. I know what you are feeling. The horrible choking stoppage of your throat so that you must gag or die as you fight to be free.

Oh, help me! *Help* me! I do not belong here. I am innocent. No one told me!

The silent screaming echoed through her skull and her arm lifted to crash through the glass. Call the man! Free the dog! Free *me!* But the old man was gone and the whistling demand of the teapot made her cringe as she ran to obey it.

The hot tea burned her throat as she gulped it down and the sudden memory of her first cup of coffee made the prison place disappear. It had been after the junior prom. She and Buck had gone to an all-night diner for coffee and she had felt too grown up to tell him that her parents had never let her drink coffee before. It had seared tears into her eyes that night.

She could still feel the prickle of the tulle bodice of the pink dress on her arms. Oh, it had been lovely to be sixteen! Her hair had curled along her shoulders and brushed against the orchid

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pinned there. She had been the only girl at the prom with an orchid, but then Buck would do anything for her.

She had been such a popular girl. Every boy there had wanted to dance with her. Even the seniors and Peggy MacCracken's cousin who was already in college had waited on line. The music had played on and on but her legs were strong and firm and tireless beneath the wispy bouffant skirt. Music swirled again across her mind, her eyes closed and her tight-lipped mouth eased into a smile.

Noise again. A banging, crashing, thudding of boots and the raucous laughter of the two jailers broke into her reverie. They burst into the kitchen shouting for food and tracking layers of mud across the floor. "Hey! Don'tcha know it's time to *eat?*" She poured the tea down the sink and quietly began making sandwiches, hiding tears of frustration at the soiled floor.

They took their places at the table, ignoring her as she moved about the kitchen, noticing her only when something more was required. It became a game to see how much they could spill. Milk from the carton poured across the formica, seeping into the cracks and dropping in slow motion onto the floor. She felt her anger rise but bit her tongue. It would never do to speak out. Soon they would be gone, back to whatever they did, and she would be left with the floor to clean again, and the dishes, the windows, the beds—the beds, oh, Lord, the *beds!* It was so late and the beds were not made!

The dirty spaghetti strands of the mop snatching at the remains of the lunch reminded her of a bedraggled pompon. Hers had been purple and orange. It had rustled like maple leaves in her upraised hands as she had jumped; laughing, crying in excitement over the touchdowns, goading the team on with a voice that became hoarse. Her legs had kicked drawing the attention of the bench boys with their giant shoulders, their helmets on their knees as they knelt in homage to the contest on the field.

The door slammed and she jumped guiltily, banging her shin against a cupboard door. The Man merely passed through without looking at her.

He came after dark, the eternal brief case clutched in his hand

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and his suit still immaculate. Did he ever really work or did he come only to torment? He glanced around the kitchen, his face a mask of supercilious contempt.

Once, when she had first come here, he had not mocked her. He had been kind and gentle, even eager to help her. But she had been pretty then. Now his eyes, when he saw her at all, held only ridicule or boredom and his mind had thoughts only for the outside people—those important people who gave him his power to rule this place and the money to keep it running smoothly. The money was very important. He said so. She knew each time the raises came because then he would smile and be happy and things were almost as they had been in the beginning. For a while. Then he would begin to crave more power or decide his domain should be larger, more modern, and the bars would slam down again.

She held her breath but this time he did not ask the question. Her mind did it for him. "Shirley, what have you been doing all day?" Doing all day? All day? Another day passed, time going, creeping away from her.

"It's raining again," he said, glancing at the patches of wet his feet had left on the floor. Then he was gone.

Bed at last. Lights out and beautiful soft darkness. The blanket chaffed at her chin and it was good to feel the realness of it. But it was not over. There was a sound and the Man was there standing beside her bed in the dark. He came to her often and once more her teeth clenched in agony. Not now, not again. She must not cry out. She must not! She lay and forced her mind back to fall afternoons and spring evenings, to pompons and corsages.

This is not me! This is *not* me! The words reverberated through her head. I can't stand this! No more! I do not belong here! Oh, sweet heaven, what would my mother say if she could see this, know what they are doing to me here? She didn't know it would be like this when she let him take me. I have to get out! I must go back where I belong, now, before it's too late!

She slipped from the bed and crept to the kitchen. There were no bars now, no locked doors. They trusted her, these omnipotent jailers. She giggled with teen-aged glee as she slipped through the passageway into the dimness of the kitchen.

It was late. The rain was streaming in sheets across the roadway when the Man's mother drove past the house on her way home from a bridge party. She could see the lights blazing from the

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tchen through the blur of the windshield and decided to stop. ne of the boys must be sick. Certainly there was trouble of some ınd. Buck and Shirley were always in bed by ten thirty. Buck ısisted on it.

The only sound in the kitchen was the dull splat of rain on the ɔof, and the rest of the house seemed as dark as the sky outside. he fluorescent glow of the overhead fixture spotlighted the litter f old high-school yearbooks and yellowed dance programs on the itchen table. Happy dancing couples stared at her from a page usted with the powder of a pressed orchid. Cheerleaders arched ı the contortions of pregame frenzy and orderly rows of elf-conscious faces grinned from beneath the faded, scribbled erses across dog-eared pages.

Whorls of dried mud marched haphazardly across the floor and he cutlery drawer beside the stove hung precariously on its ıinges. Some of the knives had fallen to the floor to gleam dully in .he silence.

Poor Buck. He deserved better than Shirley. The way she had et herself go! The horrible frumpy clothes she wore, and hiding, ɣes, *hiding* in the house all the time! You couldn't talk to her. She just sat twisting her red hands and staring at you like an imprisoned animal. It was ridiculous. You could hardly call Buck's lovely house a prison!

She pursed her lips, feeling a little silly. They'd obviously just forgotten to turn off the light in the kitchen. But she would just tiptoe down the hall and make absolutely sure everything was all right—

Buck was lying on his bed, blood oozing into the blanket twisted about his waist and blackening the lavender sheet beneath him. The two older boys were sprawled across the bunk beds, grotesque in the feeble glow of the night light. She didn't stop to look at the baby. She could not bear to go into the nursery room.

Neighbors called the police. They were frightened of the mad woman groveling in the rainsoaked lawn and screaming what sounded like "Shirley! Shirley! Oh, my God, where are you, Shirley?"

It was probably just a bunch of kids. The officers from the patrol car pulled slickers over their shoulders and ran into the shelter of the stadium. Wouldn't you know the high-school janitor would start hearing noises in the middle of this downpour? The

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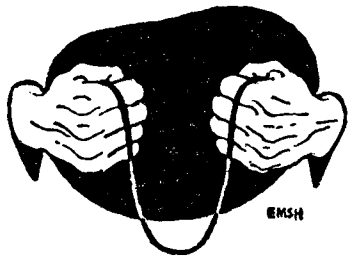
officers plodded up the ramp and looked out at the field where the white chalk marking had begun to fade in the wet.

Shirley was marching in front of the home bleachers, her arms raised in a victory sign. The officers moved closer. Her face glistened in the glare of their flashlights. The lights wavered down over a faded flannel nightgown, plastered against her thin body by the rain.

As they watched, the woman suddenly crouched against the ground in a graceless squat, then rose into the air, arms and legs thrown out in spreadeagled abandon. Her voice rose over the drumming of the rain—a young, exuberant, exhilarated voice.

"Yea Team! Yea! Yea! Yea!"



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 392nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .the story of a strange duel with the revenge of a lifetime at stake. . .

The author, Junius T. Podrug, was 29 when he submitted "Vendetta." He is a native Californian "with a lovely brown-eyed wife, one cat, and two 'vices'." The two "vices" are playing chess and reading mystery stories — and he calls them "vices" because he "should be studying for law-school exams."

His reaction to our purchase of his "first story"? "I love you, and my wife, my cat, and my creditors also love you". . .

VENDETTA

by JUNIUS T. PODRUG

The chessmen intercepted the light from the glowing fireplace and the effect created dancing shadows across the playing board that gave the pieces an undefined animation. Emil removed the captured pawn from the board, slipping his own into the conquered space, then used a handkerchief to smother an asthmatic cough.

"Your game is as flimsy as your lungs," Ludwig jeered, pleased that his gambit had been accepted, but contemptuous of the man who had seized it.

Emil chuckled. "Patience, old friend, patience. You will have the revenge you've savored for so many years. Death will be the nemesis that carries vengeance for you. Soon you will have the satisfaction of walking on my grave."

Ludwig replied with an insolent grunt, but did not speak as he moved his queen through the opening his sacrifice had created and into a position that temporarily denied his adversary's right to castle. Both men knew that Emil's death was not the vengeance that Ludwig sought. He was seeking reprisal this

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night, not the passive and nebulous reward that greater longevity might bring.

Had these two men lived in an earlier age they might have held their contest on a field of honor, but in their civilization the State held a monopoly on the privileges and immunities of spilling blood. Hence, as two old men might, they huddled before a warm fire, hardly aware of the wind and snow outside, and resolved to settle a lifetime of differences across a chessboard.

"Such boldness!" Emil exclaimed, shaking his head with wonderment. "To sacrifice a center pawn, then thrust your queen into the middle of my den at this stage of the game. Such maneuvers invite disaster, not laurels."

Ludwig erupted with pride and anger. "What judge are you of a strong attack? Your pieces cower in a cluster around your king while mine sweep the length of the board. Chess is the game of war, and timidity does not win war. Napoleon, Hitler, the masters of conflict, crushed their enemies with a ferocious boldness."

"Those two great predators won battles, not wars. It was the methodical English shopkeeper and the unyielding American farm boy who conquered. Brute force alone has never won a war, or a game of chess. The decisive factors are planning and strategy. Winning in both games is like conquering a woman: the subtle caress, the whispered endearment that disarms an otherwise impregnable defense—those are the tools, not a crushing attack that aims at naked seduction. Aggression results in rape, not love."

Ludwig recoiled from the other man's words as an image of a beautiful dark-eyed girl with long brown hair hurled across three decades to haunt him. Frieda! The memory of Frieda and the loss of her to Emil had not softened with time, but like a sore that festers and rankles until bad tissue destroys the good, brooding had muddled Ludwig's memories until only painful recollections were left.

He scanned Emil's face carefully, seeking a hint that would confirm his suspicion that Emil had deliberately provoked the vision to flaunt him with the failure, but found only a mask of concentration as Emil pondered his next move.

Emil continued the play by bringing up his queen's bishop to counter the threatening move near his king. His frail body racked with another coughing spasm and, after recovering, he peered at Ludwig

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through half-closed eyelids. "It has been a long rivalry, the two of us, eh? Much like a vendetta, a blood vendetta," he added with emphasis. "You, with your iron fist. That is how you have tried to deal with me and to deal with life. Smash and destroy! Anything that is in your way. And what is left?"

"Victory!" Ludwig spat.

"Ah, but what prize is that which has been destroyed?"

"You don't understand. You never did. It is boldness that wins life's battles. Hitler marched the length of Europe by clearing a path with a mailed fist."

"Yes, and you trudged along, waddling in his muddy bootprints. To your doom. What did it get you? Your factories were destroyed by bombs, alien troops took possession of your country. What did it get you?"

"My pride, for one. Yes, I followed Hitler. A man of strength, a man with a dream. I did not sell out to cower like a frightened child. But it was not your velvet touch that brought down the Third Reich. It was counterforce. Power! Not ideas. Naked test of power."

Emil shook his head. "The war was not a simple test of power. Hitler went to war with weak allies, across seas he knew he could never control, against enemies whose tenacity he failed to gauge. Had he waited, planned, the results might have been different. It was superior intellect that pierced the armor of the Third Reich. The Americans learned that same painful lesson in Vietnam when their overwhelming firepower failed against patient, stubborn peasants."

"It was the cowardice of whelping dogs that brought down the Third Reich. Whelping dogs that fled to England to knife their own countrymen in the back."

"It was not the dogs that fled, but the victims who ran to escape from the bite of a rabid-mad pack," Emil countered scoffingly. "A man must decide for himself what is best for his country. I saw Germany in the throes of insanity and I left for a place from which I could fight the sickness before it engulfed the entire world."

"Ah, how intellectual of you! You diagnosed the illness and ran away so you could cure it. And what of Frieda? Did you flee to cure her also?"

Emil showed anger for the first time during their discussion. "You dare mention Frieda to me? You, Herr SS Colonel! It was you beasts who destroyed my wife."

Ludwig was surprised at the loathing in Emil's voice toward

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him when he spoke of Frieda. His own loss of Frieda was ingrained so deeply into his psyche that he had never considered Emil's feelings. Now he saw more clearly why Emil had invited him to this snowbound chateau in the Austrian Tyrol.

Emil had told him of his ill health and offered him a final chance for revenge, an *affaire d'honneur* across a chessboard. But Ludwig could see now that it was Emil, too, who was seeking retribution. It made the match all the more attractive and Ludwig answered the other's accusation with fervor.

"No, no, I do not take the blame for that. True, she was Jewish and was held in detention for what was thought to be the good of the fatherland. But it would have ended there had you co-operated. I could have used my influence to see that no harm came to her. But you were overwhelmed by your traitorous intellect. You fled to work in the war laboratories of the enemy. I was helpless. It was your cowardliness that killed Frieda!"

"Come now, Ludwig, could you have protected her when the beasts hungered for blood? Would you have? You always hated me for taking her away from you. You tried to get revenge even before the war. Do you remember when you tried to drive me out of business and almost brought ruin on yourself?" Emil began a spiteful laugh that ended in a choking cough.

Ludwig was a big man, barrel-chested, with oak trunks for arms and legs, his burly strength obvious, even though his frame was bent and his shoulders had drooped from the weight of the years he carried. Now those muscles bristled as anger rekindled the hate that had brought them together. He remembered the years before the war when the loss of Frieda was so poignant, and his ego so damaged. Then came Frieda's death, the disastrous war, and the subsequent confiscation of his estate and his factories, while others returned home to govern as a reward for their treason. Ludwig remembered well and his hate nourished on these memories.

The two players directed their rancor back to the 64 squares that denoted the limits of their battlefield. After the exchange of words, each was all the more assured of the advantage of his position.

The contest pitted Emil's sly genius against the aggressive brilliance of Ludwig and had been a natural choice by which to settle their long feud. It

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complimented Emil's methodical scientist's brain, and he approached the match with a mathematician's penchant for detail, mulling over each move and calculating with discerning thoroughness the infinite variety of responses available. Ludwig was also satisfied by the weapon selected. The contest's combatant nature offered him an opportunity to couple his keen wits and reckless daring with a Draconic use of power.

A gnarled piece of log exploded, scattering red-hot chips onto the stone edge of the fireplace. The distraction shifted Ludwig's attention away from the game for a moment as he struggled stiffly from his chair and tossed a fresh log into the hearth. The house creaked and shuddered under the impact of the mountain storm and he paused to listen to the sounds the wind and snow made as those elements raged against each other.

"We're miles from the village. We'll probably be snowed in by morning."

"There is no need to fear," Emil told him. "I spoke to Herr Inspector in the village. He knows I am ill. He has promised to come here in the morning to check."

"I was not fearful for myself. We could get trapped here and end up with only enough provisions for one to survive on. One of us would soon die of hunger." Ludwig let out a guffaw at the notion of which of them would be the loser in a competition for survival.

He reassumed his position at the table. Within minutes the pace of the game took on an adrenalic fervor as they jockeyed for better position. In their obsession with the play both men lost all awareness of their physical surroundings. The Staunton chess pieces came to represent more than the inaccurate wooden reflection of medieval characters; to Ludwig they were the vanguard of shock troops that were sending an ancient enemy reeling from their lightning blitz, an army that smashed and crippled, attacking the soft underbelly of the prey's Maginot line until the seam split and the horde could pour in for the kill.

Emil shouldered the attack well, deploying his pieces with a calculated precision in a Dutch Defense, but he was still paying the price for having accepted the gambit. It left him with a weak queen's side that Ludwig was exploiting with a devastating fury.

Both players knew the penalty of even a tiny blunder at this stage of the match. Ludwig was risking all, sacri-

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ficing first a bishop, then a rook for position and leaving his defensive posture vulnerable. He held the offensive, and to keep it he gave freely of his own soldiers, and every move forced Emil to defend his pieces or remove a threat to his king. If Ludwig committed an error, made a single ill-advised move that allowed Emil to recover from the constant attack, Emil would gain the initiative and turn on his opponent's exposed rear.

The tension mounted as each waited to pounce on the other's fatal mistake. Ludwig's excitement outpaced his hatred as Emil reeled under the pounding attack, and he began to see a great victory. He waited impatiently after each move for what he considered to be feeble replies to his massive onslaught. His hands were wet and he could feel cold drops of sweat crawling down his back and under his arms.

The strain grew insufferable as Ludwig sensed the climactic moment of his triumph delayed by Emil's dawdling over every move. He wanted to shout at the smaller man or even grab him by the hand and force him to make a move so that Ludwig's mastery could be proclaimed.

Emil stared straight down at the board, seemingly unaware of the other's stress. Then slowly, soft lines began to form at the corners of his mouth and eyes; the lines cracked into wrinkles and then exploded into deep furrows as Emil burst out laughing.

Ludwig stared at him speechlessly.

"Fool," Emil gasped, choking for breath, but still bubbling with mirth.

"Emil! Are you mad?"

"Fool!" Emil spat the word contemptuously at him. "You create your own follies. Your love for power has destroyed you again. You risked all on this last chance for revenge. Look at the board, you fool! Your haste to destroy me has left you vulnerable. You're going to lose!"

Ludwig stared at the playing field, his eyes focusing on the objects, but his stunned brain refused to give the chessmen meaning.

"You've always been a big, stupid beast," Emil taunted. "I'll crush you tonight as I did when you tried to win Frieda. How we laughed at you! Did you think she would take an ape like you rather than—"

An inhuman noise started deep in Ludwig's throat and rose past his lips in a piercing scream. A single blow from his bludgeon of a fist cut short the string of abuse, bashing the side

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of Emil's head and snapping his neck.

The storm had faded and darkness had begun to yield to the inevitable dawn. The flames in the hearth long since had ebbed to cinders and then evolved into cold ash.

For hours Ludwig had sat and studied the chessboard, burning the position of each piece into his memory. He had won. That he could not wake Emil and make him admit he had lost, that there had really been no possibility of a counterattack, made the victory all the more unbearable.

So he sat in silence, burdened by the unfulfilled triumph, waiting for the Inspector to come, and embittered by the certainty that Emil had planned it precisely this way.

Vengeance against the dead is not possible, but the living must pay for their follies, and even the strong have to answer to the omnipotent State.

Ludwig had beaten Emil—and had lost all.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

"Since you choose to ignore poor work rather than condemn it by name," writes a Florida correspondent, "why not define the sort of story which so often makes any mystery-critic's life a nightmare? At least it would relieve some gripes or frustrations, and have definite therapeutic value."

The kind of story, sir, is easy to define. It's that kind in which the heroine can't make up her mind whether or not her brand new husband is a murderer; nobody else cares. Dozens of female authors still go on rewriting *Jane Eyre* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with bits of one spilling over into the other, and not one new idea in sight.

Though I am unconvinced that griping has therapeutic value, there is one consolation: this stuff lies beyond our province.

This month I offer two admirable detective novels; the first new, the second a paperback reprint modestly priced. Also recommended are one hell-roaring spy story and one cops-and-robbers caper; the first likewise new, the second likewise a reprint. Though as a rule we begin with detection and go on to cloak-and-dagger, let's reverse the order here.

From a young Israeli writer of conspicuous talent, *The Third Truth*, by Michael Bar-Zohar (Houghton Mifflin, $5.95), deals with espionage at its most dangerous when the Soviet Foreign Minister, visiting New York, is shot dead at the wheel of his car. With other Russian deaths to be explained, American authority must find and nail the culprit before tension explodes in holocaust.

C.I.A. Agent Jeff Saunders, a sound man in disgrace for one past blunder, can redeem himself only by proving the innocence of Yankee capitalism. For the first apparent truth isn't truth at all. In pursuit of a second truth behind the first, Jeff takes up the trail of three men once condemned to the horror camp at Dachau. Every character, every background rings true. That trail, bloodstained or booby-trapped, leads from the Middle East across half Europe

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until Jeff Saunders unearths evidence of a third truth, the real one, and brings this fine story to its unexpected end.

In *The Tale of the Lazy Dog*, by Alan Williams (Pocket Books, 95¢), civilized but desperate amateurs have plotted the greatest air heist on record. A billion dollars in American greenbacks, flown home from the military in Southeast Asia, will be hijacked *en route* by Murray Wilde, Irish professor-adventurer, by a don't-give-a-damn South African pilot with his black navigator, and by the murderous, overfat Frenchman called Uncle Charlie.

Amid jangled nerves or treachery, with many a near-slip and with complications from Wilde's French mistress, the plan takes off amid bursting gunfire. And, incredibly, the plot succeeds; they get clean away to a safe landing. But where they land, and under what circumstances, provide the last twist as well as the last irony in a super-thriller which won't let go.

Serpent's Tooth, by Sara Woods (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $4.95), finds Antony Maitland, that engaging barrister, undertaking a defense so desperate as to seem hopeless. Young Joe Baker, who has brutally slain his kindly foster father, admits the murder but won't say why he did it. Counsel, it would seem, can do nothing. And, with the identity of the culprit already conceded, can there be any element of surprise?

Yet surprise awaits us. In the tortured Baker family we watch the unfolding of domestic drama to heights of emotional power; and, since this is fairplay detection with all the clues displayed, the startling truth constitutes another courtroom triumph for Antony Maitland and another *tour-de-force* for Sara Woods.

Like all books by Agatha Christie, Dame Agatha's *Hickory, Dickory, Death* (Pocket Books, 95¢) is conventional only in its classic pattern: background, corpse or corpses, investigation, disclosure. On the premises of a London students' hostel, with as many nationalities as conflicting passions or politics, death slips in and out at will, first by morphine poisoning and then . . . well, read for yourself.

Hercule Poirot of the moustaches is on hand: *dignus*, I am happy to say, *vindice nodus*. In her long career Dame Agatha has devised countless traps or swindles for loyal fans; but at her lowest-down and most tricky, believe me, she never devised a subtler swindle than this.

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a *NEW* story by

HENRY T. PARRY

"You thought of everything, Howard, everything but one small detail. . ." No, there was something else that Howard had not thought of, something no one in his right mind would even dream of foreseeing. . .

HOMAGE TO JOHN KEATS

by HENRY T. PARRY

When Howard P. Ransom reached 55, he retired from his job, sold his house, murdered his wife, and settled down in Rome, thereby fulfilling four long-cherished ambitions. He loathed his house, detested his job, hated his wife and loved the prospect of taking up life, late but renewed, in a foreign capital of endless attraction.

His job, he felt, was far beneath one of his talent but it paid so well that his love of money outweighed his distaste. His house was a constant burden, insatiable in its demands for repairs, rapacious in its tax requirements, an unstaunchable bleeding of the money and time that he would rather have spent on his boat. But it was his wife Hannah whom he regarded as the major obstacle to freedom and a new life.

As the years of their marriage passed, whatever of love and understanding there may have been had vanished, with Hannah exhibiting a half-hidden sufferance bordering on contempt, and he an impotent chafing and smoldering resentment. He found that the cute pussycat face of 22 became the snarling mask of a stalking tiger at 50.

Hannah had adamantly refused to agree to a divorce, primarily because Howard wanted it. For Howard to have simply walked out was repellent to his nature, which required order and planning and abhorred loose ends and unfinished business. This plus the fatal

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flaw in the mind of every killer—the conviction that his action was justified—led him to the murder of his wife.

The act itself was simple, well planned, and swift. One of the few remaining things they did together was to take an occasional weekend cruise in the boat. Returning home just after dark one Sunday, they rounded the breakwater at the end of the Delaware-Chesapeake Canal and turned north against the ebbing tide where the river and bay met. Two miles upstream Howard put the engine on idle and came astern to where Hannah sat.

"I want you to put on this life jacket. The tide is ebbing quite strongly and there's all this debris floating about. If I have to make a quick turn and if you should be standing, you might go over the side."

"Oh, Howard, is that necessary? Such unusual precautions here on the river."

"This is practically the top end of Delaware Bay. And there's this heavy tanker traffic—"

"Oh, all right, all right. A lesson in geography. Always a lesson in something."

"Just this one last lesson then."

She stood and he helped her into the life jacket, steadying her as she staggered slightly, and swiftly tied the ribbons. He could smell the perfume she used, a smell that he had come to loathe as much as once it had attracted him.

"Howard," her voice rose in bewilderment, "what have you done to this jacket? It weighs a ton."

"Yes," he agreed, "it's packed with lead"—and he pushed her over the stern.

The greasy water was barely disturbed as she went under. He switched on the spotlight and played it back and forth over the water. Crates, fruit baskets, odd pieces of lumber, all swam placidly by on the outward tide, but the surface betrayed no sign of what had happened.

For two hours he waited, to be sure that his plan had worked, and then headed for the nearest marina and a telephone to report his well-rehearsed story to the Coast Guard, with special care in placing the scene of the incident farther up the river than it had actually occurred.

It took Howard three months to make what he thought of as his getaway. Calls placed at lengthening intervals to the Coast Guard brought no news and elicited finally the opinion that there was no liklihood of the body being recovered.

The house was sold, remov-

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ing forever the burden of wet basements, rising taxes, and ever more plentiful crops of crabgrass. Kindly neighbors offered sympathy and expressed understanding of his wish for a complete change of scene, expressions which Howard gravely accepted, inwardly relishing the contrast between his decently submissive outward manner and his inner satisfaction with the fruition of his plans.

Thoughtfully he arranged for a tombstone to be erected—a fact that was noted in the local paper—and had it incised with Hannah's name and the years of her birth and death, and, as indicative of his intentions, he had his own name added, followed by the year of his birth and a small uncarved rectangle in which at the proper time another year would be cut. With a touch of grim wholly uncharacteristic humor he thought that a suitable epitaph for Hannah might be "Lost at sea," but sensibly he restrained himself.

Late in the fall, after a dutiful and symbolic visit to the cemetery, Howard arrived in Rome. Through the columns of a newspaper aimed at the American tourist he rented a small furnished apartment in a converted palazzo on a street near the top of the Spanish Steps, a house reputed to have been owned by a cadet branch of the Medici.

After the spare trimness and openness of his suburban house he was struck by the stony, secretive exteriors of the Roman houses and the contrast with their ornate, pretentious interiors. His living room was furnished with heavy oaken furniture, elaborately carved; one chair with a faded damask cover on its tall back was supposed to have once been the property of the infamous Principe di Canisio who, it was said, had died in it, a messy affair of a jealous husband and a silken cord.

Dim acne-ed mirrors on the walls on each side of the door reflected windows with heavy velvet drapes looped back by tassled rope ties. It seemed that the same style of furniture that was suitable for the palazzo of a doge had been used in this small room, giving it a theatrical, shop-worn splendor. But Howard settled contentedly in these falsely elegant surroundings and gave himself over to the delights of leisurely explorations of the ancient city.

It was not until early summer that he saw Hannah. Or thought he saw Hannah.

He was returning from an afternoon of browsing among the many shops near the Piazza

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di Spagna and had begun to climb the magnificent stairway street of the Spanish Steps, the sweeping thoroughfare that leads majestically up to the Monte di Trinita. In the wall of the building to the right of the first landing was the shrine of millions of poetry-loving tourists, the window of the room where the poet Keats had died. He paused on the landing, looking up at the open window, and saw a woman looking down at him, a woman who resembled Hannah.

Shaken, he stared up at her, his mind rejecting the atavistic fear of the dead returned to life and telling himself to wait for a movement or gesture to dispel the likeness, for her aspect to shift from identity to mere similarity. The woman gazed down calmly, framed portrait-like in the window, an absent-minded half smile on her lips, and raised her hand; but whether or not the gesture was in greeting he could not determine. Then the woman slowly moved back from the frame of the window and was out of sight.

He stood and stared upward at the window not 30 feet a ay, his mind searching for he possibility of error in the execution of his plan, but at no point could he find a mistake. He was brought back to reality when he heard a passing American schoolteacher comment to her companion "Look. Another poetry lover paying homage to John Keats." As they passed him he smelled the faint fragrance of the same perfume Hannah had used and he wondered if he had smelled it unknowingly as he looked at the woman in the window and if it had not added a subliminal reinforcement to a chance likeness.

He concluded that the resemblance was accidental, but from that time forward, before he fell asleep at night, he saw again the face and form of Hannah framed in the window

A week later he saw her again.

It was during the intermission before the last act of "Aida," which was performed outdoors at the Baths of Caracalla. He strolled among the crowds under the lights along the wide paths that skirted the towering walls with their shadowed arches recessing into darkness. She was standing under an arch, well back from the walk and partially obscured by the shadow of a tree as well as by the shadows of the arch

He stopped, the crowd moving slowly past him, and stared at the figure that stood dwarfed by the tall arch, hugging itself as if chilled and

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idly watching the passing crowd. Her eyes swept over him with no sign of recognition and then swung back to look at him uncertainly as if she were not sure she knew him, and then she turned away toward the interior darkness of the arch, on her lips the same half smile that he had seen from the Steps.

He pushed his way through the crowd toward her but the overhead lights flicked off and on several times to signal the end of the intermission. By the time he made his way through the returning surge of the crowd she had vanished. He made his way to the entrance where the patrons were returning to their seats and although he observed each one until the first aria was well under way he did not see her again.

Similarly after the performance he watched the main exit but saw no one who remotely resembled his dead wife. But he found this occurrence less troubling than the previous one and although he thought about it constantly for days it did not cause the questioning and examination the first encounter had. A resemblance, close enough to be sure, but it was not Hannah. If it had been, he was certain she could not have resisted showing the new power which she would now have over him.

Three days later in the late afternoon he returned to his apartment, slipped his key into the handsome walnut door, swung the door inward, and froze. Delusions of sight and errors in identification were always possible but there is no auto-suggestion in the sense of smell. The living room smelled faintly of Hannah's perfume.

Terror spurted in him but he forced himself to stride into the room. Hannah sat in the Principe di Canisio's chair, her face as worn as the scarlet damask that covered the tall back of the chair, and in her hand was an ugly and unladylike .45 caliber automatic. She pointed it upward, directly at his face, so that he looked into its cruel, uncompromising muzzle that seemed small for such a deadly object.

For several seconds they stared at each other wordlessly, the woman who should have been dead and the man who should have been free. She waved the gun toward a slender gilt chair beside the door and he sat down facing her, the light from the window behind her chair making him feel, irrationally, that if only he could be in shadow he would be able to explain everything.

"How?" he managed to whisper.

"You thought of everything,

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Howard, everything but one small detail. I surfaced under an upturned fruit basket and stayed there while you were making certain with the spotlight that you had murdered me. My clothes made me buoyant for a time and the tide was carrying me downstream away from your light. When I was in sufficient darkness I grabbed a floating timber and paddled to shore just below a refinery. Murder and a polluted river, Howard! Some form of repayment is indicated, don't you agree?

"I floundered through the marshes until I came to a highway and walked along it until I found a filling station. It was closed but it was also a bus stop. After an hour's wait, during which most of the water dripped out of my clothes—but oh, the smell—a bus marked Ocean City came in and I got on. In the two-hour ride down the coast to Ocean City I planned what I would do.

"First of all, I couldn't let you, or anyone else, know I had survived. You would surely try again. I decided that this was no matter for the law and, besides, what could I prove? I had $48 in my purse. The next day I got a job as a summer waitress at a restaurant and worked there all summer under an assumed name. I even got a new Social Security number. I worked hard and they liked hard-working steady help who showed up seven days a week and didn't irritate the customers. I also subscribed to our hometown paper so that I would have some way of finding out about you. That tombstone now, that was touching.

"After the summer was over they offered me a job in their Florida place and I worked there until two weeks ago when I had enough money saved for this trip. The paper had reported your departure to live in Rome 'for an indefinite period,' it said, and how wrong that is now. My one fear was that my money would run out before I located you. I didn't realize how easy it is to find an American in Rome. Just watch the tourist attractions long enough and you'll find them.

"I saw you first at the Colosseum one day and followed you to this address. I thought at the time what a fitting place the Colosseum would be to do what I had come to do if it weren't so public. Too bad we didn't meet there by moonlight."

"May I get up and stand by the window?" he asked. "I can't breathe."

"Do," she answered, "but don't get too close. It's too late for accidents."

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He walked to the window in the wall behind her chair and stood looking down into the street. Shielded from her direct view by the tall back of the chair she was sitting in, he slowly slid one hand under the window drapery and unhooked the ropelike tie that looped the drape back.

"How did you get out of the life jacket?" he asked, not turning toward her chair.

"Oh, it almost worked. But you made one mistake—one small detail. When you tied the ribbons of the life jacket your reflexes took over. You tied the same knot that you, and nearly everybody else, ties every day of their lives—a simple bow knot. Under water I gave one pull at the ends of the ribbons and the knots came apart and I slipped out of the jacket. It was simple compared to untying and taking off my sneakers under water as we used to do when I was a girl in camp. If you had tied a good hard square knot, Howard, things would have been different for me. And for you.

"If you're wondering about the gun, I borrowed it—stole it really—from the Florida restaurant. They always kept one near the cash register."

He whirled from the window and leaped toward the back of her chair, the drapery tie outstretched between his hands. Her first shot, fired in frightened reflex at his reflection, shattered the mirror on the wall opposite her chair. Hanging over the chair back, he fumbled desperately to twist the rope tie around her neck. She slid from the chair to the floor and fired backward and upward in the blind instinct of self-preservation.

Howard staggered backward from the impact of the shot, one hand jerking upward and holding the moth-eaten drapery tie as though in some baroque scalp dance, the other clutching the window drape which he pulled to the floor with him as he fell, his body becoming partly hidden in its pretentious folds. She pulled herself to her feet and stood over the body, sickened at the reality of what her plans had brought to pass, and dreading the possibility of having to fire again. But the thing that lay there was still and dead, the rope tie grasped in one hand.

She replaced the gun in her bag, inspected the room carefully to be sure she left no trail, and left the apartment without looking back. She made her way through the streets to the top of the Spanish Steps, rejecting the waiting taxis in case the drivers would be questioned later. Going down

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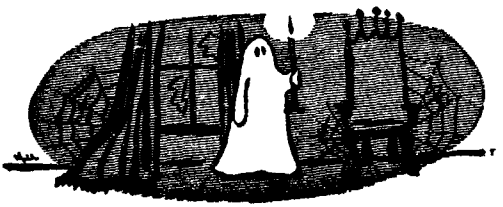
the long cascade of the Spanish Steps, she stopped at the landing one flight from the street below and looked up at the figures that drifted aimlessly past the open window of the room where Keats had died.

She wondered what historic shrine this house might be but knew that now she would never find out, any more than she would learn whether operas were performed in ruined bathhouses, as advertised. She had already placed a foot on the next descending step when her body contracted with rigid terror. Looking down at her from the open window of Keats's room was Howard, or a man who at this distance resembled Howard in startling detail.

He stood in full view immediately in front of the window, looking patient and expectant. She stared up at him in a paralysis of fear; he gazed down at her with serene assurance.

Then the figure slowly disappeared backward into the room, smiling as if in anticipation and passing confidently, almost negligently, through one hand and then the other a faded rope tie.



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a *NEW* Ed Gorgon story by

JON L. BREEN

Ed Gorgon, major-league baseball umpire, is back—with a reminiscence of a radio broadcast in the late sixties when the most important drama took place not on the diamond but in the radio booth . . . Meet Buzz Rizzleston, the grand old man of broadcasting, who had good reason to believe that baseball broadcasting is a dangerous business.

MALICE AT THE MIKE

by JON L. BREEN

If you ever lived in the Middle West, I know you'd remember Buzz Rizzleston. Certainly his name, and probably his high, rather screechy voice—that is, if you ever listened to the radio, even if you didn't care about baseball. Because if you ever turned the dial on your radio, looking for Amos 'n' Andy or whatever, hearing Buzz's voice would be sure to make you pause for a moment.

You might have said, how'd a guy who sounds like that ever get to work in radio, the medium of Milton Cross and Lowell Thomas and Harry Von Zell? But then you'd stop a minute to marvel, and there was something about that voice that would get a hold on you, make you want to listen, even if as far as you were concerned Babe Ruth sounded like a candy bar.

Yeah, it was quite a voice, and you could always hear him, because his home station, WBB in Chicago, was a 50,000-watter, and his baseball broadcasts were on a dozen other smaller stations scattered all over the Midwest.

Buzz Rizzleston was an acquaintance of mine and today I want to tell you about sitting in a radio booth with him one day in the late 1960's, during the last season he worked the games on WBB, though he didn't know at the time it was his last year. My name is Ed

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Gorgon and I'm a major-league umpire of some years' standing. But at that particular time I wasn't doing any umpiring because I had a badly sprained ankle and wasn't getting around too well.

Buzz called me up and invited me to sit in the booth with him for a Saturday afternoon game—first he invited me, then he begged me.

"I need your help, Ed," Buzz said. "Somebody's trying to kill me."

Under the circumstances I could hardly turn him down.

How many people do you think it takes to broadcast a baseball game? Let me set that day's scene for you, and maybe you'll be surprised.

The broadcast booth is a sort of partitioned-off area of the press box, containing a long table with folding chairs. The Chicago Hoggers have a three-man broadcasting team: there's old Buzz himself, a skinny, bald, and by this time rather frail-looking guy of 70 (remember he dates back to the days of Graham MacNamee), a real loud but at the same time super-casual dresser. Today he's wearing a blood-red sweatshirt, baggy denim trousers with paint stains on them, and comfortable-looking brown sandals with bright Day-Glo orange socks.

Then there's Alex Rhodes, a crew-cut three-hundred pounder who has been Buzz's Number Two man for about 20 years. Alex dresses more conventionally but still more for comfort than appearance (how much can you do at 300 pounds in that direction anyway?). Alex is a very smooth and very professional announcer, though his deep and beautifully modulated bass seems more likely to lull fans to sleep than to fire them up to get out to the ball park.

The third member of the team is Billy Conover, until a couple of years ago the star second baseman of the Chicago Hoggers. I know what they say about ex-athletes turning sportscasters, but this kid is really taking it seriously: a brief case full of preparation, an on-the-air delivery that would make Howard Cosell jealous, and, perhaps most important, a smart junior-executive wardrobe. I might mention here that the owner of the Chicago Hoggers owns a chain of clothing stores, which must have made it hard for him to put up with Buzz Rizzleston and Alex Rhodes all those years.

But that's not all. There's Doug Peck, the engineer, and Ross Bodgner, a kid whose job is to get late scores of other

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games off the Western Union teletype, and Doc Spoon, an old crony of Rizzleston's (and his personal physician), who keeps score for Buzz and also keeps a body between him and his announcing partners.

All the broadcasters, you see, hate each other. Buzz thinks one of his play-by-play men is probably the author of the anonymous notes, which he showed me before the game when he asked me to watch for the threat on his life which he is sure will take place at any moment.

As the game is about to commence, we are seated in this order along the table, overlooking the field:

D	R	E	B	D	A	E	B
O	O	D	U	O	L	M	I
U	S		Z	C	E	M	L
G	S		Z		X	A	L
							Y

I haven't mentioned Emma. She's Alex Rhodes' wife, an angular, stern-faced battle-ax who keeps score for Alex. Billy Conover keeps his own scorecard. That's right, sports fans, they hate each other so much they won't even use the same scorecard. Fortunately, Emma, Doc, and Billy are on good enough terms to get together on things, so their three scorecards agree.

Billy Conover is last one into the booth, because he has to do the pregame interview. He comes rushing in just as Alex Rhodes is announcing the lineups for the game between the Hoggers and the L.A. Surfers. He pours himself a quick cup of coffee from the pot sitting on a little hotplate. Billy drinks it black.

At the end of the lineups we stand for the National Anthem. It's quite an engineering feat for Alex to heave himself out of his chair, but he makes it in time for "what so proudly we hailed." I notice out of the corner of my eye that Billy fidgets during the anthem—Billy's a very nervous, high-strung type. And a hungry one, just as he was as a ballplayer.

Baseball announcers guard their innings like they were the crown jewels. Under the setup used by the Chicago Hoggers this year, Buzz Rizzleston opens, doing innings one and two; Alex Rhodes has innings three and four; Buzz comes back for five; Billy Conover gets the sixth, his one chance to shine; Alex does seven; and Buzz does eight and nine. In case of extra innings Buzz goes on till he gets tired and then gives it to Alex. Billy is out of the picture by now, waiting in the clubhouse to do his postgame interview.

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And I should add that Buzz is allowed to jump in on the other guys' innings to put in whatever sage comment happens to occur to him, but no one can open his mouth during Buzz's innings, unless it's something really important. Like if the press box is on fire.

So Alex, with his eyelids looking sleepy, says into his mike, "Pitcher Crib Jagger takes the last of his warmups, and here for the play-by-play, in his thirty-ninth year as voice of the Hoggers, the old philosopher himself, Buzz Rizzleston." That's a set introduction, written into his contract.

Alex leans back into his chair, ready to shut up for two innings, and Buzz leans forward, looks lovingly at the microphone, and goes to work. I wonder if the folks who listened to Buzz back in 1930 thought it was possible his voice could ever get worse. It was possible.

"Hi, folks. It's a great day for baseball, sun's high in the sky, and a fine pitching duel's in prospect. Crib Jagger is five and one on the year so far. First batter's up there now, Denny Judson, his name, shortstop of the Surfers. A .249 hitter. First pitch low for ball one.

"Guest in the booth with us today, Ed Gorgon, a great umpire. How's the ankle, Ed?"

I don't answer. Even a guest in the booth doesn't encroach on Buzz Rizzleston's innings.

"Hey, that's great. Be out there again any day. One of the great umps. Ball two. Doc Spoon here with us today, keeping the stats for us, doing a fine job, as always. Doc's been with us since 1944. Little grounder to short. Up with it little Jose what's-his-name, throws him out. One down.

"Marty Marion used to make that play. All the great infielders used to make that play. Make it look easy. Heck, it is easy. I coulda made that one myself, right, Doc?

"Smith the batter. What's he hitting? .300, huh? Way over his head. He'll be .240 by July fourth. We've seen some great morning glories in our day, haven't we, Doc? Spring phenoms, can't take the guff. Holds that bat like he knew what it was, what it can do. A confident grip. Lou Gehrig used to hold his bat that way, all the great hitters. But this guy's fooling. He's no hitter. First pitch a ball.

"Wowee! The next one's a line drive to Crane at second. What a play! What a second baseman! Best guy at second sack the Hoggers have had in twenty years. I think my broadcast partner Billy Conover will be the first to agree he

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couldn't have made that play with a fishnet. Billy Conover never saw the day he could make that play. Two down.

"It's a great day for baseball, fans. Eddie Gorgon here beside me, one of the great umps. Better not second-guess the arbiters today, not with Ed here. You tell me if it's a bum call, Ed, and I'll lay it on 'em, but you say the word first. For the Hoggers, against the Hoggers, whatever. They blow one, Ed, and you tell me, and I'll tell the world. We respect you, Ed. We all respect you. A man who's done his job long and well deserves our respect. Many of the young have no respect today, Ed Gorgon, and that's the trouble with this world.

"The third guy gets a base hit to right. First hit of the ball game off Crib Jagger. I don't know if he has his stuff today. That was a sharply hit ball. One on, one out. What's that, Doc? That's right, two men out, the roller to Jose and the hard shot to Crane.

"What a play that was, Billy Conover. Eat your heart out, like they say. Billy knows I'm just kidding, and anyway we can't all be great glove men. When I played ball back in high school I was a crummy fielder. That's why I became an announcer, so I could be a pro at something. Some guys never get to be pros at anything.

"Has Jagger got a three-ball no-strike count on that guy? Holy mackerel, Doc! Where's his control? I think it's pretty well recognized, even in the Hoggers' front office, that it was one crummy deal that brought Jagger to the Hoggers from St. Louis in exchange for two regulars who play every day. If we'd had those two regulars last year, Doc, it would have been a World Series check, but that's water under the dam, ain't it?

"Good greasy gravy! It's ball four. That's Hollingsworth, the Surfer first sacker going down to first. At least he can't hurt us with the long ball, but, Doc, it's two men on now with only one out. No, check that, it's two out. Roller to Jose and smash to Crane. So, let's see, it's McMillen on second now, a good runner. How many steals last year, Doc? No steals? Well, he was a good runner when he came up in '53. I remember that well.

"In sixty years of watching baseball I've seen days as nice as this, but certainly none nicer, have you, Doc? It's a great day for watching baseball.

"Well, look at that! A check-swing roller back to the box off the bat of the Surfer hitter, and Jagger makes the easy play to first. He got out of

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it. Dumb luck. For the Surfers, no runs, one hit, no Hogger errors, and two men left, and the Hoggers come to bat in the first. Let's get some runs, 'cause this guy gonna need all he can get!"

As I sit watching the game and listening to Buzz Rizzleston describe it, I think back to what he told me the night before. "Anonymous notes, Ed. Threats. Here, look at this one."

All in block capitals on plain white paper, it says:

IF YOU WANT TO LIVE DO IT AWAY FROM THE HOGGERS.

And another:

HANG UP THAT MIKE OR YOU'RE A DEAD MAN.

And a third:

SATURDAY YOU DIE. PICK YOUR INNING.

"During the ball game, Buzz?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Sick, isn't it, Ed? I mean it's sick. I mean that Rhodes or Conover should want my job so badly. It's no secret that Mr. Hammond intends to cut back to a two-man team next year. And I'm not going to retire, Ed, and obviously Hammond wants me in there. So it's between Rhodes and Conover.

"One of them's going to try to kill me Saturday, Ed, during the game. Only time they could get close enough to me—that is, if it happens during the game—nobody but those two in the booth are close enough to me. Do you see?"

"But how, Buzz? How can they do it without being seen?"

"I don't know. That's what has me worried. Poison? All I'll drink during the game is coffee, and Doc makes that—and I can trust Doc. I just put a little non-dairy creamer in it. Oh, and I take my pills. I have to. But Doc has those. They can't get to 'em. So how will they do it, Ed? How could they be so small?

"I'm going to be worried during that game tomorrow, Ed. Not so you'll notice, but I'll be really worried. I'll feel better if you're there, though. Can you be there?"

So here I am. Through the early innings I notice that Buzz has taken a few pills, provided by Doc Spoon, with water out of the cooler next to Ross Bodgner's teletype. Everybody's been drinking out of that water cooler, and as I watch Ross hand Buzz the water I see no chance for slipping something in the water, water being a poor vehicle for poison anyway, unless the poison is completely tasteless and invisible.

By the end of the fifth in-

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ning only Buzz and I of the booth's occupants have abstained from the frequently replenished coffee pot. They all seem to drink it black, however, and the jar of powdered cream substitute stands unused next to Buzz's microphone.

Buzz doesn't sound like worry has affected his delivery and he could get back in the game at a half-moment's notice —during another guy's inning.

At the completion of the beer commercial between innings five and six, Alex Rhodes intones, "And now for the play-by-play of the next inning, that all-time Hogger great, Billy Conover."

"Thanks, Alex. We go to the top of the sixth, no score. Crib Jagger has held the Surfers to three hits. Crib's not the fastest we've seen him today, but he's getting beautiful action on his breaking ball. Mark Smith the batter, O for two, a line drive right to the second baseman Crane and a fly to center.

"The first pitch is a fast ball on the outside corner for strike one. Mark Smith told me before the game he's using a lighter bat for quickness, but giving up some control that way. You have to give up something to get something.

"The next pitch, a breaking ball low for ball one. One and one. Jagger gets it back, looks in to get the sign. Working quickly now, he winds up and here's the pitch. A smash to short, tough play for Gomez, who has to go deep. His throw's a little low, Anderson stretches . . . *SAFE*, says the umpire, as the throw pulls Anderson off the bag. Anderson is hot! He thought he got him! He and first-base umpire Fred Sims are at it nose to nose."

"What about it, Ed?" Buzz piped up. "Was he safe?"

"I can't question another umpire's judgment, Buzz."

"Well, I can. He was out! Anderson's foot was on the bag. He came off, but only after he'd made the play. That was the worst call I've ever seen!"

"Bad call or not," Billy Conover says, "the runner Smith stays at first, and it'll go as an error on Gomez, whose throw pulled Anderson off the bag."

"It didn't, it didn't! There's no justice in this world if Smith is in," Buzz screeches.

"Well, there's no justice then. I can tell you these umpires are more often right than wrong. That's my observation as a player."

"The dumb jock!" Buzz mutters, off mike.

Billy Conover tries to get on with the game. "Next up is McMillen. Singled in the first, then struck out. One for two."

"Umpires are human just

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like anybody else," Buzz says. "I'm sure you'd be the first to admit that, wouldn't you, Ed?"

"The first pitch is a little low—"

"If an umpire could just admit his mistakes, like the rest of us. That's the thing."

"Jagger says his breaking ball this year is—"

"I admit it when I get the count wrong, don't I, Doc? Why, I'll bet in my years of broadcasting I've made as many as half a dozen mistakes. You can attest to that, Doc."

As this goes on, Billy Conover is getting understandably nettled. I don't hear many play-by-play men work in my job, being down on the field most of the time, but he sounds like a good one to me, especially in view of the lack of support he gets from his senior colleague. This is his only inning, and he can't even talk uninterrupted.

"The count now is two balls and no strikes on McMillen. Chance for a double play here, as McMillen is slow getting down the line—"

"He could run in his day, couldn't he, Doc? Back in the fifties."

"The next pitch, swung on and tapped weakly down to second. Crane goes to Gomez for one, back to Anderson—"

"They got two! Great job by Crane starting that double play."

Fury is written all over Billy Conover's face. He picks up a press release in front of him, wads it up, throws it point-blank at Buzz Rizzleston, gets up, and stalks out of the booth.

"Ed!" Buzz screams. "Ed," he tells the whole Middle West, "he tried to kill me, Ed. You saw him! That kid tried to kill me!"

I can imagine what that must have sounded like to all the baseball fans listening, who generally go elsewhere for the kind of dramatics Buzz is providing. I also wonder what Paul Hammond, the Hoggers' clothing-store-magnate-owner, thinks of all this, if he's listening up in his box. The next question: will some little men in white coats be stealing into the booth in a moment to take the old philosopher Buzz Rizzleston away?

But Buzz recovers quickly. He chuckles into the mike. "Well, folks, our colleague Billy Conover has retired for the day. I know you remember what a temper Billy used to have as a player, and he never quite overcame it, isn't that right, Doc? But he'll be a fine announcer one day, improving all the time. He'll be a good one. Maybe not with the Hoggers, though."

A little chuckle. "Our apologies if we got a little excited,

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nerves a little on edge today, for reasons you folks wouldn't know anything about. We have to do a job no matter how we feel, no matter what's going on or what's going through our minds. Right, Doc?

"Two out, and the big tall kid up there. And it's a three-and-two count. Did I mention Ed Gorgon is with us today?"

Yeah, Ed's in the booth today and mighty uncomfortable. The engineer Doug Peck has poured himself a cup of coffee, and I decide I could use a little, too. I pour a cup and reach for the jar of cream substitute. As I reach for it, Buzz waves his arms like a damn goony bird, yelling, "Strike three! What a pitch!" He knocks the jar out of my hand and onto the floor, the powder spilling all over the desk and the floor around me.

It's at this point that a small light-bulb, invisible to the naked eye, appears over old Ed's head. When Buzz breaks for the commercial I whisper in his ear, "You know, I think that jar of creamer ought to be analyzed."

"Arsenic?" says Buzz Rizzleston.

"Yeah, mixed in with the powder. Enough to kill." I'm sitting in his apartment, high over the lakefront, that same evening, my bad ankle propped up on a footstool. He lives alone.

"Arsenic. Well, I guess I was right. You've been to the police on this?"

"Sure. I have lots of police friends."

"Arsenic. No kidding. Should I call the papers?"

"The papers?"

"I think the papers should know somebody on my own broadcasting team tried to kill me."

"Who could have got to that jar of creamer, Buzz?"

"Any of them, Ed. Any of them. But Doc is out and so are Ross and Doug. No motive there. It's got to be either Billy Conover or Rhodes or Rhodes's wife. That dame always did hate my guts. I'd pick Conover, though. I've always tried to help him, break him in, give him the benefit of my experience. But he always resented it, Ed. You saw how he acted today. I never saw such hate in a kid's face as I saw in his. It scared me, Ed."

"But he's young and got a future, Buzz. Anybody could tell he's a natural broadcaster, and he seems to do his homework. Besides, why make a scene like that and draw attention to himself if he knew he'd poisoned the creamer and would get you that way?"

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Buzz shrugs. "His temper. He's always had a terrible temper, Ed. But I suppose you're right. It was probably Alex or Emma."

We pause for a minute. "Seems like I almost got the poison meant for you, Buzz."

"That was sure lucky, wasn't it? You see, the one who did it knew I was the only one of that crew who didn't drink my coffee black. They didn't figure on you being in the booth. Spoiled everything for them. Lucky how it turned out."

"Very lucky. Buzz, put yourself in the murderer's place. If the wrong guy started to take the poison, what would you do?"

"That's a tough one, Ed. If I could, I suppose I'd—"

"Knock it out of his hand?" I said.

"Well, yeah, right. But I knocked it out of your hand, Ed, so the murderer didn't have to."

"Very lucky. And very convenient, wasn't it?"

"That was a great pitch Jagger threw. I got excited. After all these years the old man can still get excited about baseball, Ed. It's a great game, isn't it?"

"The greatest game in the world."

"So what are your police friends doing about this attempt at killing me, Ed? They haven't been around to talk to me yet."

"They won't be doing much, Buzz. I explained the whole thing to them."

Buzz doesn't answer. He stands with his back to me.

"What were you planning, Buzz? How were you going to call attention to the arsenic in the creamer without actually taking some yourself? Certainly you didn't plan it to happen as awkwardly as it did?

"The giveaway should have been when you seemed to pass over the creamer as a possible vehicle for the poison. How could you miss it? But you knew I'd pick it up—you wanted me to. Did you think I was smart enough to figure out where the poison was and yet too dumb to figure out that you were the one who must have put it there?

"And did you really think you could save your job by writing those notes to yourself and then poisoning the creamer to throw suspicion on your fellow announcers? Did you really think that could work, Buzz?"

He finished out the year, but as I say it was his last. Now Billy Conover is the voice of the Hoggers, and Alex Rhodes is still Number Two. He doesn't seem to mind. They even use the same scorecard.

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a *NEW* crime story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves." Morrisey didn't agree with Shakespeare, but the Bard, as always, knew whereof he spoke . . .

THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

BY midnight the only thing left open in the airport was the coffee shop and that was crowded. But there was a vacant chair by a table near the far wall. And because I was tired of wandering around aimlessly, listening to the storm lash the building, I went over and asked the four glum-looking men sitting there if they minded my joining them.

"No," said the one sitting at the head of the table, "join the happy throng." He was a big florid-faced man with a booming voice to match his face. "I'm Ryerson. The character next to me is Simmons. And those two are Morrisey and Block. And now you know as much about them as I do. But we're all friends together—at least until this damned storm blows over."

I murmured my name and pulled a vacant chair around, Morrisey moving over to make room for me. He was as big a man in his way as Ryerson but less inclined to a paunch, although age had begun to blunt his heavy-featured face.

"Any news about when we can expect a flight out of here?" Simmons said. He was a slender man who, despite the closeness of the room, still wore his raincoat over his suit.

"No," I said. "The airlines don't even have anybody manning their desks any more. And you can't blame them. Even if a plane could get in, nobody in his right mind would get on it in this kind of weather."

"The least they could do, though," Simmons grumbled, "is find us a motel."

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"Hell, man," Ryerson said, "I can find you a motel. There are dozens of them right down the road. The trouble is the road's flooded and you can't get there from here."

Block frowned as if in concentration. "For some reason your name's awfully familiar," he said to me. "You have any relatives around Seattle?"

"No," I said. "But you may have seen the name in print. I'm a writer."

"Of course," Block said. "You write those mystery things, don't you?"

I nodded, pleased. My name wasn't that well known, and I didn't often run into people who recognized it.

"Mysteries, huh?" Ryerson said. "Then this must really be the night for you." His voice took on a forced theatrical quality. "'Twas a dark and stormy night—' "

I smiled politely. "That particular ploy is a little timeworn," I said. "But, still, you never can tell. Maybe I will work it in sometime."

"What really gripes me about you mystery writers," Simmons said, "is the way you idealize and romanticize the police. After Chicago—"

"Oh, hell," Ryerson said. "What are you? One of those bleeding-heart liberals who thinks the police are all pigs and every criminal is a hero?"

"Not a hero," Simmons said hotly. "A victim. There wouldn't be any crime if society didn't make criminals."

"Oh, come on," Ryerson said.

"The link between crime and poverty—"

"Is a lot of hogwash," Ryerson interrupted. "I was born as poor as anybody. And I didn't go bad. Neither did a lot of other guys in the same situation. It's what's inside that makes you go bad. Nothing else."

"'The fault, dear Brutus,'" Block murmured, "'is not in our stars, but in ourselves.'"

"That's right, by George," Ryerson said, but Simmons shot at dirty look at Block.

"You can't solve today's social problems by quoting Shakespeare," Simmons said.

"Perhaps not," Block said. "But you can learn a lot about human nature from him, and that hasn't changed." He turned to me. "What do you say?"

"Don't look at me," I said. "I just write what I think will sell."

Simmons sniffed scornfully, but before he could say anything more Morrisey put in, "I really don't want to argue with the Bard," he said, "or agree with Simmons. But time and chance do affect our lives."

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"Not in mine," Ryerson said. "I'm exactly what I set out to be."

Morrisey stared at him coldly for a long moment. "Aren't you the lucky one?" he said and with that rose and stalked out.

Ryerson blinked after him. "Hey," he said. "What's eating him?"

"Who knows?" Block said with a shrug and turned back to the table.

After that the talk drifted into a desultory discussion of the weather and our mutual predicament. I waited a few more minutes for the sake of courtesy, then I too left.

I found Morrisey standing alone by a window at the far end of the corridor, gazing moodily out at the rain-lashed field.

"Thinking," I said as I came up, "or brooding?"

He smiled wryly. "Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference," he said. "Our friends still arguing back there?"

I shook my head.

Morrisey's eyes narrowed. "Then why—"

"Did I come out? Frankly, because I didn't think you'd said everything you could have back there. And curiosity is an occupational disease among authors."

Morrisey smiled again. "I imagine it is." He turned back to face out through the window again. "You know," he said at last, "I don't think I've told this to another living soul. And I doubt that I'd tell you either if I thought there was the slightest chance we'd ever meet again. But we won't. And"—he shrugged—"who knows, you may make a story out of it."

I smiled myself. It's surprising how many people think they have something an author might "make a story of." Sometimes they're right.

When I graduated from law school (Morrisey said) back in the early fifties, the watchword was "security." And the goal of every graduate was to attach himself to a large and prosperous corporation. I know today things are different and "organization men" are objects of pity if not outright contempt. But that wasn't the case in those days, and I honestly believed that my opportunity to join the prestigious firm of Lawson, Lawson and Minor, Attorneys at Law, was, as everyone assured me, the chance of a lifetime.

And perhaps it was, because it was obvious from the start that the firm had tagged me for better things than a junior associateship. And why not?

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Hadn't I been second in my class and the best debater?

It was a mark of the favor in which I was held that less than six months after I'd joined the firm I was called into the office of Mr. Lawson, Senior.

I can remember that office perfectly. It was almost solid oak—oak floor, oak walls, oak desk. And from the ruggedness of his face and the sturdiness of his character old Mr. Lawson himself could have been carved from the same wood.

He was sitting at his desk, gazing out the window, when I announced myself. "I have some said news," he said without turning around. "Old Mrs. Wallace died last night."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said. And I was although I'd never met the lady. She was, however, one of the firm's oldest clients—a wealthy eccentric from whom the firm had drawn a substantial fee for many years in return for handling her affairs, legal and otherwise.

"Yes," Mr. Lawson said, "I'm sure you are. But she was past eighty and these things are to be expected. And the business of living must go on. First, though, there's the matter of settling her estate. I'll handle the probate of her will, of course. But I would like your help with the inventory of her effects at the apartment." He smiled slightly. "It's a clerk's job really, but I expect her grandson will be looking for younger blood to represent his legal interests and this is your chance to make yourself known to the family."

Lawyers are supposed to be equal to any situation, but this one left me practically speechless. If the Wallace family did pick me to handle their legal affairs, it wouldn't be long before my name would be added to the firm's letterhead as a partner.

Later that afternoon I presented myself at the building where old Mrs. Wallace had spent her last years. It was one of those sleek concrete-and-glass boxes that even then were beginning to ruin our cities' skylines, complete with a liveried doorman and a snooty reception clerk to screen out the hoi polloi. The clerk's attitude thawed visibly, though, when I identified myself.

"Of course," he said. "Mr. Lawson phoned and told me to expect you. Shall I take you up now?"

"If you don't mind," I said. "I would like to get started."

He took me up in what had been Mrs. Wallace's private elevator, the only one that reached to the top floor where

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she had lived in solitary grandeur. Someone had placed a seal over the door lock. I broke the seal, and the clerk used his passkey to let us in, then stood in the doorway watching as I started my inventory. For some reason, though, it made me nervous to have him standing there, so I said rather pointedly, "A Miss Loretta Parks from the State Inheritance Tax Division will be here in a little while. I'd appreciate it if you'd send her right up."

He frowned slightly but was too well trained to ignore a dismissal when he heard one. So after a few moments' hesitation he inclined his head gravely and went back down the elevator. Which left me to get on with my job.

About a half hour later the state assessor showed up. Except for the clothes that crammed her closets, Mrs. Wallace hadn't burdened herself with too many personal possessions, and we finished listing and valuing them in a little over an hour. I kept one copy of the list for the firm's records, gave the other to Miss Parks, and we left together, carefully locking the door after us.

And that was that. Or so I thought until Mr. Lawson, Senior called me back to his office some four days later.

He was behind his desk again, but this time he wasn't alone. A younger, angry-looking man sat in a client's chair to his right but pulled around so that he faced me.

"There seems to be a small problem, Morrisey," Mr. Lawson said, addressing me but keeping his eyes fixed on some point on the book-lined wall behind and above me. "Mr. Wallace has noticed a slight discrepancy in your inventory of his grandmother's effects."

"Slight discrepancy, hell," Wallace said. "Where is it, you dirty crook?"

"Where's what?" I said.

"My grandmother's ring. The huge square-cut diamond my grandfather gave her when he brought in his first oil well."

I shook my head. "There was no ring like that in the apartment when I made my inventory," I said.

"The hell there wasn't," Wallace exploded. "I saw it there less than two days before she died." He turned to Mr. Lawson. "I kept telling her it was too valuable a piece to leave lying around loose like that. But she insisted she could keep it as safe as any bank, and you know how she was when she got her mind set on something."

Mr. Lawson nodded gravely.

"All right," I said. "A valuable ring has been stolen.

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But you have no right to accuse *me.*"

"I'm afraid we have," Mr. Lawson said, letting his eyes rest full on my face for the first time, "because the simple fact is you were the only one who *could* have stolen it. Mr. Wallace discovered his grandmother's body when she failed to answer his ring. Not having a key, he was obliged to go back down and have Meiggs, the reception clerk, let him in. They remained together in the apartment until the doctor and the funeral director had come and gone. Then they left together. So at no time—until you went in—was anyone alone and unobserved there."

"Unless," I said, "someone went in after Mr. Wallace and Meiggs left and before I arrived."

"I'm afraid that possibility has been ruled out, too," Mr. Lawson said. "The only access to the apartment is through that private elevator and both Meiggs and his night replacement had that under reasonably constant observation and can swear that no one used it."

"What's more," Wallace put in, "I took the precaution of sealing the door when Meiggs and I left and that seal was intact until you broke it."

"That can mean only one thing then," I said.

"You're damned right," Wallace said.

I met his eyes squarely. "It means that the diamond is still in the apartment," I said. "And a thorough search will turn it up."

Wallace snorted and made a scoffing gesture with his hand, but Mr. Lawson nodded. "That is a possibility," he admitted, "and I think we owe it to Morrisey not to exclude it. So in the interests of settling this matter once and for all, I suggest we three go over to the apartment and make that thorough search right now."

And that is exactly what we did. That is, they let me search while they followed me from room to room and watched, Lawson grave and impassive, Wallace sardonic and skeptical.

I had no experience in searching rooms, but I think I did a more than reasonably good job of taking that place apart. I started by emptying all drawers of their contents, then checking the backs and sides and bottoms for tied or taped-on treasures. I pulled books from their shelves, rolled up rugs, and made interior and exterior measurements to ferret out any possible concealed compartments. I even emptied the bulging closets and probed and tapped for loose boards or hollow spots.

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At the end of three hours the place was a shambles, but I had found nothing of value that wasn't listed in my inventory.

"How long is this farce going to go on?" Wallace demanded at last.

Lawson nodded his agreement. "I do think," he said to me, "that we have pretty well exhausted the possibility you raised, Morrisey."

I shook my head stubbornly. "That ring is here," I said. "It has to be."

"Very well," Mr. Lawson said. "If you wish to continue the 'search' you may. But I see no reason for Mr. Wallace and me to waste our time." He turned to Wallace. "Coming?"

Wallace hung back, eyeing me suspiciously, and Mr. Lawson smiled faintly. "It's all right," he said. "Morrisey knows what his chances would be if anything else turned up missing."

"Yes," Wallace said, "I imagine he does." He thrust his face close to mine. "And let me tell you what your chances are right now—absolutely zero. Because you're going to be watched every minute of your life and if you make the slightest effort to turn that ring into cash, I'll know it and I'll pounce. You just remember that and stay awake nights trying to think of a way out."

And with that he strode out of the apartment. Lawson nodded briefly in my general direction, then followed.

I watched as the elevator doors closed on them and the cage started down, then turned despairingly back to the apartment. That damn ring had to be there! But where? I'd looked everywhere. Hadn't I?

And then through the open bedroom door my eye fell on the jumble of clothes piled on the bed. And I realized that there was one place I hadn't looked.

I found it in fifteen minutes, tied up in a crumpled handkerchief and pinned inside the sleeve of an old blue evening gown—an enormous square-cut diamond in an ornate gold setting.

Morrisey paused and smiled wryly again. Outside the storm beat with unabated violence against the window. "Mr. Lawson accepted my explanation as I laid the ring on his desk the next morning without comment, but it was clear from his expression that what he really believed was that I had simply found a face-saving way to extricate myself from a situation that had gone sour. And the following month my services were no longer required by the firm. Ostensibly, it was

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an economy move. But I wasn't naive enough to believe I had any future left in the law."

"So," I said, "your detective work was all for nothing."

Morrisey's smile deepened and turned wryer. "Not quite," he said. "I'd realized almost as soon as I'd found the ring that without witnesses I didn't stand a chance of being believed. In fact, I was in a worse position than if I'd never found the ring at all, because now there was 'proof' where before there had been only suspicion. So I didn't tell them about the other diamonds I found hidden in other old dresses—the brooches, earrings, and the string of genuine pearls. And as soon as I was sure no one was paying attention to me any more, I sold them and used the money to make a new life for myself."

He let his eyes come up to meet mine squarely. "So I ask you: wasn't I right when I said that time and chance do play their parts in our lives?"

"Q"

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Inspector Petrella stories by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

The fire in the garage on Banting Street was "of suspicious origin." But the motives behind the fire were not at all clear. . .The second in a brand-new series about Petrella at Q — about the policeman's daily lot. In a forthcoming issue it will be the case of a particularly unpleasant anonymous letter. . .

OF SUSPICIOUS ORIGIN

by MICHAEL GILBERT

When Inspector Petrella arrived, Banting Street was blocked by a line of fire engines. Ahead of him he could see a column of billowing smoke, white where the spotlights hit it, shot through at the base with spiteful little tongues of orange flame. Over all hung the sharp ozone smell of the foam extinguishers.

He pushed through the crowd and ran into Bill Brewer, the Borough Fire Officer. Brewer said, "Lucky we got here as quick as we did. With this wind it could have taken out half the street. But we've got it under control now."

"What is it?"

"Garage and workshop. Won't be much of it left by the time we're through." This was punctuated by a crash of falling timbers and a firework display of sparks.

"Any ideas?"

"I'll give you my ideas in the morning," said Brewer, and hurried off. It was evident, even to Petrella's inexpert eyes, that the fire was subsiding. He went home to bed.

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When he got to Patton Street the next morning he found on his desk a copy of the report which had gone to Superintendent Berriman, the head of the uniformed branch. It said that the Premier Garage on Banting Street belonged to William Cookson, who had acquired it three years before. There was a workshop, which formed the whole of the ground floor and had working space for two cars. There was a yard at the back with a small office and leanto accommodation for four more cars, which was approached from Kentledge Road and Banting Passage. There were living quarters over the workshop.

It was the last sentence in the report which caught Petrella's eye. This said, "The fire brigade authorities are not satisfied as to the origins of this conflagration."

Petrella was still wondering why Constable Mitchinson, who had written the report, had used a four-syllable word to describe a one-syllable event when Bill Brewer was shown in.

He said, "Send your suit to the cleaners, Patrick?"

"I'm afraid I had to," said Petrella. "I ought to have had the sense to wear a gas cape."

"Messy things, oil fires. This one's messier than most, I'm afraid."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that it certainly wasn't an accident."

"Sure?"

"Dead-sure. It had three different points of origin—two in the workshop, one in the office at the back. Okay, I'm prepared to believe a fire can start accidentally. What I'm *not* prepared to believe in is three separate accidents happening on the same premises at the same time."

"I suppose not," said Petrella.

"We'd call that conclusive by itself. But it's not all. Not by any means. There was a strong wind last night. It helped to spread the fire. But it also blew it away from one of its points of origin in the office at the back. And we found this."

He took from his brief case an object wrapped in tissue paper, unwrapped it, and placed it on Petrella's desk. It had suffered in the flames, but was still recognizable as a small alarm clock, with the frayed ends of two wires sticking out of the back.

"What did it do?" said Petrella.

"Quite a neat job. It was connected to the electric fire in the office, through the fuse box. Whoever set it up took out the fuse, then turned the electric fire on. When this jigger

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went off it restored the circuit. I don't know what had been left in front of that fire—a pile of cotton waste soaked in petrol or maybe a box of old film. Whatever it was has been destroyed, of course."

Petrella looked curiously at the twisted, fire-stained relic. He said, "Is there enough of it left for your experts to be able to say when it was meant to go off?"

"Nine o'clock, they think, and that was roughly when it did start."

"Is there any indication of how the other fires started, in the main workshop?"

"Not a scrap. Like I said, this little fellow wouldn't have survived if the wind hadn't blown the flames directly away from it."

He wrapped it up lovingly and said, "I'll hand it over to you after I've written my report."

"I'd better be having a word with the owner," said Petrella.

He had a policeman's memory for faces, and he recognized Willie Cookson as soon as the man came into the room. He had last seen him four years before, when he had been inquiring into a case of organized pilfering at the Crossways Goods Depot. Cookson, who was large, cheerful, and red-haired, had been one of the men Petrella had talked to. His hair had a touch of gray in it now, and he was not looking cheerful.

He said, "People have been talking, I hear. Saying I started that fire. They're damn liars. I was nowhere near the place when it went up. If I had been, I'd have done something about it, wouldn't I?"

"Where were you?"

"Wasting my bloody time."

"All right," said Petrella. "Tell me about it."

It was a simple story, but almost completely unverifiable. A man had telephoned Cookson at seven o'clock, when he was shutting up shop. He said that he had a five-year-old Bentley for sale and had been given Cookson's name by a friend. It was urgent, because he was leaving the country next day. That was why he was willing to let it go cheap. He had mentioned a price, and Cookson had realized that if the car was in good condition it was a real bargain.

The caller gave his address, a house between Dartford and Northfleet. Cookson had said he would drive right out. The man said not to come before half-past eight or you won't find anyone in.

Cookson had arrived promptly at eight thirty. The front gates were padlocked, and there

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was a For Sale notice hung on them. However, a small side-gate was open, so Cookson had left his car and walked up to the house. No lights were showing, and there was no answer when he rang the bell.

"I hung around until after nine," he said, "although I knew it was no good, really. I could sort of feel the house had been empty for some time, if you know what I mean."

"I do know what you mean," said Petrella. "I think it's the smell. Did anyone see you on your way out or coming back?"

"A load of people, I expect. No one I particularly noticed, though."

"I take it you're insured? For the fire, I mean."

"Of course I'm insured."

"Let's go down and look round."

"If you think you'll find anything," said Cookson. "The fire boys have been combing it over since first thing this morning."

It was a sad sight. Two steel girders of the main structure were still there, but they looked as if they might collapse at any moment. The ground was knee-deep in charred wood-work, twisted metal, and the remains of what might once upon a time have been two good-looking motor cars.

Petrella climbed through to the back. Here, as Brewer had said, the destruction was less complete. The little brick-built office, which stood at the back of the yard, with a window giving onto Banting Passage, had suffered least of all. Petrella said, "When did that happen? That wasn't done by the fire."

He was looking at the window. There was a splintered break in the woodwork of the cross bar and the clasp was hanging by a single screw.

"Search me," said Cookson.

"It looks as if someone forced the window from the outside. What did you keep in here?"

"Papers mostly. Account books. Trade catalogues. Nothing anyone would want to steal."

"And you're certain this hadn't been done when you locked up last night?"

"Well, I'd have noticed it when I locked up, wouldn't I?"

"I suppose so," said Petrella.

He went back to Patton Street. Brewer's report arrived that afternoon. Petrella wrote his own that evening. Arson is a felony, so the reports went up to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In due course Cookson was charged.

On the morning of the preliminary hearing Superintendent Watterson walked

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down to the Police Court with Petrella. He said, "I'm surprised Cookson is fighting it at this stage. The normal thing would be to plead not guilty and reserve his defense."

"He's not only fighting it," said Petrella, "he's got Trapper to do it for him. I've seen him in action before. We're not going to have a walkover."

"Do you think Cookson did it?"

Petrella walked a few steps before answering. He said, "The circumstantial evidence is strong. The garage lost money in its first two years. It was insured. The fire was clearly a fake. Cookson was the only person who stood to gain. But I'm not sure it adds up to proof. And I'm puzzled by that breaking in. The only person who *wouldn't* have to break in to start a fire was Cookson himself."

"That could have been a fake, too."

"Yes, it could have been," agreed Petrella.

The first witness for the Crown was Bill Brewer. He was taken carefully through his report by the solicitor for the police. When he had finished, Mr. Trapper rose to his feet. He was a big, full-jowled, black-haired solicitor, who conducted a flourishing one-man practice near the Oval.

He said, "I have no questions to ask Mr. Brewer. The defense accepts that the fire was caused deliberately." Then he sat down.

The solicitor for the police looked annoyed, and crossed out the names of the two experts he had been planning to call from the Forensic Science Laboratory.

The next witness, a Mr. Phipps, gave formal evidence of the existence of a comprehensive insurance policy on the Premier Garage, and added that, at the moment, his company was withholding payment.

Mr. Trapper said, "Please tell the Court when this policy was taken out."

"It was taken out three years ago, when Cookson purchased the garage."

"When *Mr.* Cookson purchased the garage," suggested Mr. Trapper gently.

Mr. Phipps blushed, and said, "That's right."

"Did you have a valuation made?"

"Yes. We agreed on a valuation."

"And that was three years ago. During which time the value of all properties has gone up. Isn't that so?"

"I believe so."

"Then at the moment the garage is underinsured."

Mr. Phipps hesitated. The

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Magistrate said, "Come, Mr. Phipps. That's the effect of what you've told us, isn't it?"

Mr. Phipps looked unhappy, and said, "I suppose it is."

Petrella gave evidence of having examined the garage the following morning. He agreed that the window at the back appeared to have been forced. He was not cross-examined.

The next witness was an accountant. He produced a sheaf of papers and told the Court that the Premier Garage had lost money in its first two years and might have been coming out even at the end of the third year.

Mr. Trapper said, "These accounts were given to you voluntarily by the accused?"

The accountant, who did a lot of work for the police, and who knew Mr. Trapper, agreed cautiously.

"I imagine that he was proud of them, wasn't he?"

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Come, come," said Mr. Trapper. "A newly established garage. A lot of initial expense to write off. Getting into the black by the third year. That's pretty good, isn't it?"

The accountant boggled at "pretty good," but settled for "fair." Mr. Trapper let it go. Some plans were produced and agreed, and the prosecution's case was closed.

Mr. Trapper said, "I should be justified, sir, in asking you to rule at this point that the prosecution has failed to make out its case. I shall not do that because I have some witnesses I think you'll find interesting."

Petrella and Watterson looked at each other uneasily. Mr. Trapper was famous for his surprise witnesses.

The first was an A.A. patrol, who stated that he had seen a car outside Cranbrook House, Northfleet, a house he knew to be empty, at ten minutes to nine on the night of the fire. He had stopped to see if it was in trouble, but since it seemed to be in order he had gone on. He had, however, made a note of the car's number in his log, which he produced. It was clearly Cookson's car. The police solicitor could think of nothing to ask him.

Mr. Trapper's second witness was a taxi driver. He said that he had parked his taxi in Kentledge Road at about half-past seven for a short layoff and a smoke. It was opposite the end of Banting passage, and he had seen two men doing something to a window farther down the passage. Mending it or breaking it. He couldn't see which, and it wasn't any of his business. They were still there when he had driven away.

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"Could you recognize them?" said Mr. Trapper.

"Not to say recognize."

"Did either of them resemble the accused?"

"Him? He'd make two of them."

"You mean that the accused is much larger than either of these two men?"

The taxi driver agreed that was what he meant.

The prosecution did their best but were unable to shake him.

Mr. Trapper said, "The absurdity of this charge must, by now, be apparent to everyone. First, it was suggested, if I understood the police case, that the whole story of my client's visit to Northfleet was a fabrication. In the light of our evidence they will be forced to abandon that line. I suppose they will now say that the telephone call was invented, but that, to support his story, my client actually motored out there and hung around in a deserted garden for half an hour. Why should he do that? To establish an alibi for a fire he had arranged to start at nine o'clock? Ridiculous. If he wished to establish an alibi, why did he not go to some function — the social club run by his old workmates and friends from Crossways, for instance? They had a dinner and dance on that evening. Then he could have produced fifty people to support his alibi."

Mr. Trapper blew his nose loudly at this point and said, "And perhaps someone will explain why the accused hired two men to break into his own garage. Wouldn't it have been easier to lend them a key? This whole case is founded on a faulty premise. The Crown says this garage was doing badly. It was insured. The accused burned it down. He was the only person who could benefit. Now we know none of that's true. This garage was doing well. And going to do even better. The people who would want to burn it down — the only people with any possible motive for burning it down —were his rivals. The people he's taking business from. It's common knowledge there are too many garages in this district. There's one in the very next street. Of course, I'm not suggesting—"

"But he bloody well did suggest it!" said Watterson, as they were walking back to the station after the case had been dismissed, and a contingent of Willie Cookson's friends from the Goods Depot had cheered him all the way out into the street. "Albert Rugg keeps the Octagon Garage in Kentledge

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Road and everyone knows he's been losing business to Cookson."

"Albert was in court," said Petrella. "You should have seen his face."

"It's not funny," said Watterson. "We've been made to look stupid. There'll be a rocket from District about this."

"If Albert got anyone to do his dirty work," said Petrella, "I guess it would have been Stan and Les Corner. Should I pull them in and put them through it?"

"Drop it," said Watterson sourly. "The case is dead. It's finished."

But here he was wrong.

Albert Rugg, owner of the Octagon Garage, was a bachelor, like Cookson. He didn't live above his business. He had a comfortable flat, over a newsagent's shop, a quarter of a mile away. He came back to it a week later and had shut the flat door before he realized he was not alone. Not only was Willie Cookson waiting for him, but with him were three friends from the Crossways depot.

Albert was fat and a bit of a coward. He started to bluster, and when he had been knocked down twice he looked fearfully out of a fast-closing right eye, and said, "What's it all about? What do you want?"

"You know damn well what I want," said Cookson. "I want the truth."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The largest of the men closed in again. Cookson said, "Hold it. We want him in one piece. He's going to sign a confession."

"I got nothing to confess," said Rugg. "Just because that smart-aleck Trapper tried to put the blame on me. I ought to sue him for libel."

"I tell you what we ought to do," said the second of Willie Cookson's assistants. "I seen this on television. We tie him in a chair and take his shoes and socks off. And we put one foot on the electric fire. It's effective, see?"

"It sounds effective," agreed Cookson. "Let's give it a try."

In no time at all they had Albert lashed to a dining-room chair. When he started to shout they stuffed the socks they had removed from his feet into his mouth and tied them there with towels.

At this point the doorbell rang. Cookson said, "See who it is and send them away."

One of the men went out. As he opened the flat door it came inward with a crash and Stan and Les Corner came in fast, supported by a cousin called Lew.

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Stan Corner said, "Lucky I happened to see these guys come in"—and battle was joined. It was a lovely fight. The railway men were large and determined. The Corner boys were smaller, but they had a slight edge in skill and experience. They used for weapons whatever pieces of furniture came to hand.

The only people who took no part in the fight were Albert Rugg and Willie Cookson—Albert, because no one had time to untie him, and Willie, because he was hit on the head by a small table and lost interest.

Fortunately, before anyone could be killed, a soap-stone model of St. Paul's Cathedral was thrown by Stan Corner through the window and landed at the feet of P. C. Owers, who summoned assistance on his pocket radio and went to join the party.

It's a funny thing," said Petrella to Watterson, "but no one seems to want to prefer charges."

"Not even Rugg? Owers says they had him tied up with his socks in his mouth."

"I think Rugg has got a guilty conscience," said Petrella.

"I suppose we could charge them with a breach of the peace."

"It was a fairly private fight," said Petrella. "Until they nearly brained Owers with St. Paul's Cathedral."

"We must do something about it. If we don't, we shall have a gang war on our hands."

This was the second prediction which Superintendent Watterson had made. It, too, was proved false. The final act took place some weeks later, in Mr. Trapper's office.

An agreement was signed by William Cookson and Albert Rugg—"hereinafter called the partners." Cookson supplied the money, which the insurance company had now reluctantly paid up; and Rugg supplied the premises. The new garage was to be called the Premier-Octagon.

"A simple case of reorganization," said Petrella when he heard about it.

"Q"

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a *NEW* crime story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

If there's any writer, man or woman, who depicts the Reno-Las Vegas-Nevada scene with more conviction than Florence V. Mayberry, we just don't know who it is. All her stories project the "spirit of place," but equally important, perhaps even more so, all her stories are packed with "heart." There's a catch, often a sob, in her voice and a lump in our throats. . .

WOMAN TROUBLE

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

I never did like living in Reno. I'm a desert woman, born and raised just outside Winnemucca, Nevada. Trees and buildings, and all those crowds milling around day and night on the streets get in my way. I like to see clear and far off. Horizons, mountains. Even people stand out better in the open desert. You can see them coming, all alone and separate instead of muffled up in all that town stuff.

Have you ever smelled, real good, the sage coming in off the desert after a rain? Clean, heady, sweet. Seems to scour out the lungs and makes your brain fresh. You can remember you've got a heart, even a soul. Well, that's what I wanted for Paddy.

Paddy belongs to the desert. Wyoming country, he was born there. Up where buttes are swept by winds and you have to struggle a little to fill your lungs with oxygen, it's so high in the sky, you know. Couple of years after we were married Paddy took me back to his old home ranch. Well, it wasn't his any longer—he'd lost it fooling around in Nevada's gambling clubs. But the people who bought it from the bank are nice folks, old friends of the family, and they pretended the ranch was still Paddy's.

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Paddy and I rode alongside the buttes, sometimes stopping the horses and edging them together so we could kiss. "Paddy," I told him, "let's save up and buy back your ranch. Town's no good for us, we're open-country people." Especially town's no good for Paddy, I was thinking, and he knew it.

He grinned and said, "You're right, girl. No dice tables out here on the open range." He patted my arm and added, "First big killing I make, and I sure ought to be due for one soon, we'll buy us a spread. Build us a brand-new house on it with all the fixings, good as back in Reno."

Good as! My God. A two-room-with-kitchenette apartment. A stove with an oven which baked lopsided. A dwarf-sized refrigerator. And all the gambling tables in the world, it seemed, just down the street.

"Paddy, I don't need fine things, I'm not used to them. It would be fun to camp out in a cabin, cook on a wood-stove—nothing bakes good like a wood range. It would be like when I was a kid. Home-baked bread—my mother always did her own baking and she taught me. And we could have a little garden, Paddy. You'd be outdoors a lot—indoors don't suit you, Paddy, staying in that warehouse all the time, lifting those heavy loads."

"Lifting loads, woman?" His face took on that remote expression he always got when he decided I had gone too far interfering in men's ways. "You mean pushing so hard on those little levers that do all the lifting? With a hundred-eighty-pounds, six-one of a man to do the pushing? Well, Angie, I sure got a hard life."

I wanted to say it was lifting the dice, shaking them, tossing them out that was too much for a hundred-eighty-pounds, six-one of a man. But when he got that look Paddy scared me. No, no, I don't mean he ever hit me or roughed me up. He never did. Why, Paddy would just spit on the ground when he heard about men who hit women. Said only feisty little men did that who were too scared to tackle a man. But once, after that look, Paddy had walked out of our apartment and didn't come back. It took me a week to find him. Down in Vegas. And another week to beg him back.

That time I wished he had hit me instead. All the money we had in our joint savings account, $715, went that time. To the last penny. It takes a lot of standing on your feet and waiting on customers in a

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department store to get that much put away above what it costs to live these days.

Paddy didn't believe in savings accounts, even though I had his name on the bank book. Said it was for men who didn't have the guts to take a chance, or for women. That's why it didn't bother him when he drew it out. Grinned, patted me on the back, and said he'd pay it back one of these days with interest.

Me, I didn't care if he ever paid it back. All I wanted back was Paddy.

Like that evening later on when I was snuggling my face against his, whispering I wouldn't trade him for the whole world tied in ribbons.

He kissed me and whispered back, "You're a good kid." Then he scooted me off his lap, stood up, gave me a little smack on the bottom, and said, "Think I'll hit the clubs a while. Think I'll begin my first million tonight. So I can get you that little ranch you're always talking about. Only it'll be a big one. Maybe I'll try for two million, so's I can fence it in with those ribbons you're always talking about."

"Oh, Paddy, please! Don't go, Paddy. I don't want to be rich. I don't even need the ranch. Paddy, you know it's just you I need. And you've been away so much lately. Every night, Paddy, the last few weeks."

"Maybe there'll be a few more nights, too," he said easily. "Stick with it, one of these nights I'll strike it rich."

"I'll go with you, Paddy."

His face set. "No. You bug me at the tables."

No use arguing with Paddy. Unless I wanted to set out on another search all over Nevada.

I remember it rained that night in Reno. A good steady rain. Once I thought, I'll just go along Virginia Street, down the alley by the clubs, find out which one Paddy's in, say it was raining hard and that I'd brought him an umbrella. But it scared me to think of the way his face would look—*I'm a man, Angie, don't wet-nurse me. You bug me at the tables, Angie.* Or maybe he wouldn't say anything. Just never come home.

I'd rather he hit me every day, honest I would.

I woke up in the morning and felt for him next to me. The sheet was cool, untouched. All around me, all through the apartment, was the sweet sage smell that rises off the desert after a rain. But it wouldn't make the ache in my head go away. I perked some coffee, waited a while to eat, and hoped he would show up before

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he had to go to work. And I said to myself, *Damn the gambling and the gamblers, damn Reno to hell.*

Reno could have been a nice place, you know. A sweet hometown with the Truckee River running through, willows all along it. Over to the west, Mount Rose with snow still on it in summer. Old brown fat Peavine Mountain squatting toward the north. And the clean lovely desert spread to the east. My God, it could have been nice to live in with the man you love. Only it wasn't.

I left a place set at the table in case he showed up. Then I went down on Virginia Street, making like I was window shopping. At 6:30 in the morning, yet! Hoping I'd see him, but that he wouldn't see me: *Angie, you trying to make a woman out of me? I thought you married me because I was a man.* At 6:30 he could be grabbing a bite to eat at one of the club lunch counters, because he had to be at work by seven.

Then I saw him. Coming out of a club with a tall red-blonde holding onto his arm, almost head-high with him. Laughing, throwing her head back, tossing her long shiny hair. She had on a long black dress and it fit her like she was the model on which all women ought to be patterned. I noticed that especially because I'm short and stocky-built. Not fat or anything, just short and stocky-built, the strong kind. I used to help my Dad chop wood—Mother and Dad never had any boys.

I wanted to walk over and sock the girl in the nose. But I always have a sense to be fair about things. It was Paddy who needed the sock in the nose. How would the girl know Paddy belonged to me if he didn't tell her?

I speeded up and came even with them just as she leaned toward him and kissed his cheek. Paddy had his arm up hailing a taxi. I said, "Hi, Paddy, won't you be late for work?"

Paddy was a gambler. His face stayed cool and easy, and it was like hoods dropped over his eyes so I couldn't see into them. "Hi, Angie," he said with his mouth. But I could feel the inside of him saying, *Get the hell out of here.* That wasn't fair. He was the one on the spot, not me. Besides, this was woman trouble. I'd never had woman trouble with Paddy before. Far as I knew. A wife can't buckle under when it's woman trouble.

"I laid out your breakfast on the table—you shouldn't go to work on an empty stomach.

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Paddy, I don't think I've met your friend."

I was talking to Paddy, but I was looking square at this woman. Woman she was, somewhere between 25 and 30, not much younger than me. She had the skin and the looks of an 18-year-old, only young kids don't get that confident look on them. This woman looked strong and sure of herself, like maybe she'd fought her way up.

She was beautiful, I'll say that. Her eyes were so blue their color almost hurt you to look at. Big, too. Only thing, they stared at me bold as brass, shrewd too. Had me figured first look, and it was striking her funny. She took on a little half smile like she was holding back a laugh.

She knew how to put on makeup, just enough to turn her skin to honey and rose. Or maybe the Lord shot the works on her, maybe she was born that way. Makeup on her eyes, though, and lashes that almost brushed her cheeks. And like a halo, all that red-blonde hair.

"Is this your wife?" she asked Paddy.

He nodded and said, easy, "Sure is. Angie meet Molly."

She looked him level in the eye, laughed, and said, "You're a cool one, I'll say that for you." She turned to me. "Chin up, lady, so he can take a poke at it for good measure." She laughed again, climbed in the taxi and drove off.

What she said shook Paddy. He whipped his face away from the taxi like he'd been slapped, and he didn't give me that goodbye look like he had just before he'd hopped off for Vegas. He said, "I'm sorry, Angie. But you shouldn't have come looking for me. And I'm not going to lie to you, tell you I was just coming out to put her in the taxi. I was going with her."

Well, I couldn't hardly jump on him after that. I mean, he'd come square with me. So I said, "I'm sorry too, Paddy. See you tonight. I've fixed up a good roast for dinner." *Last night while you made up to this Molly with her bold, laughing, beautiful face, I was home cooking for you. I'm not ugly, Paddy. I got big brown eyes, nice features—you told me it's brown eyes you like, not blue like yours. You said brown eyes always got you.*

He let a deep breath sigh out and said, "Okay. See you tonight."

"You've never hit me, Paddy. Not once. She shouldn't have said that."

Kind of like it hurt as the words came out he said, "She's seen 'em hit." Then he turned and walked off.

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What do you do when you love a man and as far as you know he's never two-timed you before, and then you find out he did—or was going to? And you begin thinking maybe all those gambling nights and the money gone, that $715 out of the savings account—maybe it wasn't all for gambling?

You brood on it, if you're like me.

All day long while I was selling girdles, pantyhose, and things, I couldn't stop thinking about that tall bold Molly. The way she laughed and told off Paddy, and him standing there looking like he could eat her. And the contempt she'd had for his little dumb wife.

Paddy was there when I got home. He didn't say anything, just pulled me down on his lap and kissed my forehead and my eyes. "You got nice eyes, Angie," he said. "They never did see nothing bad about me. You got nice lovin' eyes."

That's all. What I wanted to say was such a big lump in me that I was afraid to let it out. So I just kissed him.

But after dinner I said, "Paddy, let's pull out and go on up to Wyoming. We could save for our own place up there as well—maybe better—as here in Reno. I could find a job and maybe you could get us a little house on a ranch where you'd work. There's an old cabin on your home place, maybe they'd rent it to us and we could fix it up. Get our roots in."

"One of these days," he said. "Maybe."

He helped me with the dishes that night—usually he didn't do that, said he felt silly lifting teacups with a rag in his hand. But that night he helped me. And he kissed me sweet. Tender, it was. Never once mentioned going to the clubs. It was wonderful.

But sometime in the night—well, it was two o'clock when I turned on the light—I found myself alone in the bed. Paddy was nowhere in the apartment.

Molly, her name was. *Angie, meet Molly.* That's all, no last name. How do you find a Molly in a place as big as Reno?

You get up and dress and go down to the gambling clubs and start looking for Paddy. Or Molly.

But I didn't go. Paddy needed some kind of honor, even if it was the kind I made up myself.

Around four o'clock I laid out some potatoes, ready to fry the way Paddy likes them. Set the table pretty. Listened for the creak of the elevator which meant somebody was coming up. Went to the bathroom to do what I could about my face. Bluish circles under my eyes

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smudged the upper part of my face. Face puffy from worry and lack of sleep—or like a puff adder getting mad, ready to strike. I was only in my early thirties, but this morning I looked 40 or more. Little dumpy woman. Why wouldn't Paddy, eyes blue as heaven, six-one of muscle, a sidewise grin, why wouldn't—

"Stop it!" I told myself in the mirror. "Stop it!"

Paddy loved me. He told me so lots of times. And Paddy never lied, no matter what else he did.

I put the potatoes away in the refrigerator, drank a cup of coffee, and walked to work. It wasn't fair, and besides we didn't have a car any more. Used to, but Paddy hit a winning streak a year or so back and wanted to raise his bets. So I signed the car over—it was in my name—and Paddy sold it. Oh, well, it costs money for gas.

It's tough to stand on your feet all day, straightening up counters that customers are always messing up the minute you've folded things. It's tough smiling, when you ache all over from wondering where Paddy's gone to. I thought once I'd call him at work. But if he was there he'd be mad. And if he wasn't there his boss would be mad knowing Paddy's wife was hunting for him again.

I tried to eat a sandwich at lunch, but it just wouldn't go down. So I asked my boss could I go home, I didn't feel good. He was real nice, told me not to come back till I felt completely okay. They like me at work. Steady, always on time. Just a dumb, steady, day-after-day salesclerk that redheaded Molly wouldn't be caught dead being.

I went home and took a couple of aspirins. Tried to lie down and relax. Got up and mopped the kitchen and bathroom. Took a shower. Put on my new coral pants suit. Took it off. Broad as a barn door from the rear. Put on a long straight jersey dress. Looked like a Japanese wrestler in a nightgown. Finally put back on the dark dress I had worn to work. And it was past five o'clock and no Paddy.

Well, Reno's free and open—anybody can go in the clubs and play a few nickels and dimes in the slot machines. That's what I'd tell Paddy if I saw him. But maybe he wouldn't see me. I could hide behind the machines, leave once I knew where—no. Not if he was with Molly.

I walked my legs off that night. Tried to eat a hamburger. Couldn't make it. Got to bed around three in the morning. Alone.

Next morning I called at

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work and said I was still sick. It was no lie. I was sick. The boss was nice, said to take care of myself. So I was ashamed to walk the streets, running in and out of clubs. I stayed in the apartment. Which was good because Paddy's boss telephoned and asked what happened to him the last two days. "We're sick," I said. What kind of sick? "We must have eaten something funny. Sick to our stomachs."

"Yeah," his boss said. "Not down in Vegas again, is he, Angie, and you packing to go find him?"

"Listen, Pete, you got no right to say that—my God, can't a man have a stomachache without—"

"Okay, okay, Angie, cool it. Take care of yourselves. Tell Paddy to forget about tomorrow, it's Saturday, he might as well get a good start on Monday."

"Thanks, Pete, I'll tell him."

If Paddy was in the clubs he was like a ghost slipping in and out, because I hit them all. And that wasn't Paddy's style. Even losing, he'd stick at one table, waiting for the odds to break his way. And Paddy hadn't left for Vegas, he was still in Reno. My insides told me so.

They kept telling me something else. Paddy was with Molly.

So I concentrated on how I could find Molly.

You ever looked over the list of attorneys in the phone-book yellow pages? In Reno? You wonder how they all eat, except Reno's built on divorce as well as gambling—some fine recommendation for your hometown, huh? I started calling attorneys' offices and ran smack into, "Molly? The last name, please? You say you saw this lady drop her purse in one of the clubs and there's no identification in it, so how do you know the name is Molly? Oh. One of the dealers. Well, my suggestion would be to ask that dealer about her, or turn over the purse to the cashier or the police." A long pause. "May I ask why you didn't just give it to the lady?" Or, "I'm sorry but we never give out clients' names. Why don't you try the police?"

Well, it was a dumb try anyway.

I thought, why not go down to that club where I first saw Paddy with her and ask around.

Down to the club. Jangling, brassy sound of slot machines, busy, busy. Everybody pulling handles like it was a job doing some good, like cleaning up the world or something every time a coin dropped in. Most of the time nothing was coming out, no loaf of bread or can of

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beans, nothing. Once in a while a little money to be stuffed back into the machine.

"Say, do you know a pretty redhead named Molly? Tall girl, dressed good. She was here the other night. I—I've got something I think may belong to her. I got to find her."

The dealer at the blackjack table grinned sidewise and said, "Honey, I hope it's something nice you got for her. If it is, you might try the office. Something different, you better take it home. No, I don't know any tall redhead named Molly."

I tried a couple of other dealers. Then the lunch counter. A waitress there said, "Say, aren't you Paddy Finley's wife?"

I nodded and she said, "I thought so. See, I used to live in your same apartment house, couple of floors below, but I used to see you come in together."

"I've got something may be this Molly's," I said again. "The other day down here I saw her with—something like it. But I don't know where to find her. I just thought someone here might know her."

She gave me a quirky smile. "I don't know her, honey, but I do know Paddy, he's here a lot. Hard to miss Paddy, looks like kids used to think cowboy heroes ought to look. Eastern divorcees still think that. You know what I'd do, Mrs. Finley—I'd go home, take two-three aspirins, and have yourself a nice rest. Then when Paddy came home you'd be in shape to flatten him. Wanta cup of coffee, I'll throw in the aspirin?"

"It's peculiar, how when your mind's upset it's the middle of your stomach that hurts. Like a knot tied in it. But all the time the real hurt is in your mind where you can't touch it.

Out on the street, up a way, I got this queer feeling. Like I wanted to shake all over but was too frozen to do it. I felt something either pulling on me or breathing on me. I mean, it was screwy, like I was a Geiger Counter and had run into what I was looking for. I turned.

Across Second Street, headed towards the alley that leads into the clubs, was Molly. Wearing a long bright-green skirt and a white turtleneck sweater. With all that pretty reddish hair in a big topknot, like she was deliberately making herself taller than she already was. Conspicuous, you know?

Paddy wasn't with her.

I was so relieved I felt like I ought to walk over and apologize to her. Instead I went close to the store windows, turned, and watched her swing along the street. Like she'd

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owned Reno so long she'd even forgotten it belonged to her.

Then I saw him, Paddy. Walking fast behind her, his long legs giving at the knee in that little bend that cowpunchers never quite lose. He came up to her, grabbed her arm, flung her face to face with him. She wasn't surprised. Just took on a strong bold look. Said something. Laughed. He grabbed her throat and shook her back and forth. Her long legs kicked at him, her fingers raked his cheeks. Her knee came up hard. Paddy staggered back, bent over. Even from across the street I could see he was pale, sick.

Molly turned away, cool as you please, not even touching her throat though it was bound to be hurting. Bold as brass. Still owning the town, she was.

I cut across the traffic to Paddy. He was leaning against a building, while people clustered around staring, eyes thrilled like they were watching a movie being shot.

"Paddy, let's go home."

Somebody snickered.

Flames shot through me. Like a chimney long unused and then too much paper is put in the firepot and the soot blazes and sets the house on fire. I plunged into the ring of gawkers, punching, slapping, screaming for them to mind their own business, to leave my Paddy alone.

I felt hands on my shoulders. Paddy's hands. "Angie, that's enough. Let's get out of here."

The crowd parted and we walked through it, turned towards the river. Paddy hailed a taxi and we got in it. Paddy wasn't walking too good.

"That Molly—that Molly, why did you—" I began after we shut the door of our apartment.

"I don't want to talk about it," Paddy said, his face white and drawn. He went in the bathroom and closed the door.

I made some coffee, then stood by the stove wondering whether he'd rather have steak or soup. Or if either of us ever wanted to eat again.

It's hard for a wife of twelve years not to ask her man why he chokes a girl he's just met. If he just met her. Especially with Paddy always spitting on the ground at the mention of men who hit women. Said they ought to take out their mad on wrangling horses or find a man their size or bigger. Now he was choking Molly. Like she had set him crazy.

And then she bested him, right in the middle of Reno with his wife and a crowd watching. *Damn you, Paddy, how'd that look in the papers if a cop had been around and taken you*

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both to the station and me, too? The papers saying your girl friend beat you up and your wife beat up the crowd for snickering. Like you were some ragdoll for women to toss around. Damn you, Paddy, how'd you like that?

Paddy was a long time in the bathroom. I heard the bath water running. When he came out he was shaved and had on clean underthings I kept in a bureau for him in the bathroom. "I got soup hot and steak ready to broil," I said as he went through the living room to the bedroom, that's the screwy way our apartment was.

"I don't want anything."

I heard him moving around the bedroom. Pretty soon he came out, dressed up, and his suitcase in his hand. "So long, Angie," he said.

"You can't go like this, Paddy. It's not right, it's not fair to me. We got to talk. Listen, Paddy, I can overlook what happened. Just tell me why, then we won't talk about it any more."

"This time don't come looking for me," he said, staring straight ahead at the outside door.

"Paddy, you don't want her after what she done—she don't want you, you don't want a woman don't want you. But I want you."

"So long, Angie."

"Paddy, let's pack up and head for Wyoming, get out of this damn state with its no-good life, gambling, and loose women like—"

He wheeled on me, his eyes blue fire. "Don't say her name!"

He opened the door and went out. I just followed him, like a puppy dog that's been kicked but won't stay home. Down the hall after him. He took the stairs instead of the elevator, his long legs going fast. I kept up. Outside on the sidewalk, down to the corner, me with no purse or anything.

He turned and said, "Angie, I don't want you no more." He started walking again, with me right behind.

He began running. I'm stubby-built, but I've got lasting power. I ran behind him, down almost to Virginia Street. Paddy stopped and I stood beside him.

"You want to go along and hear me tell her I love her before I kill her?"

"You're not going to kill anybody."

"Okay, just keep hanging onto my tail." He started walking, and I did too. We crossed the Truckee Bridge, over by the old Post Office, past the Holiday Hotel. Turned back again, the opposite direction, with him trying to lose me, up the hill

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above the river, then we turned again.

"You got no pride, Angie," he said over his shoulder.

What's pride? It don't fill emptiness. I kept walking.

Finally he stopped in front of a fine old house above the river, not far from downtown, that was split into apartments. "She lives here," Paddy said, "I'm going in. And if she's not there I'll wait for her. Because she's mine, she's not going to change her mind just because she's got her divorce and is tired of playing around. Angie, you go get you a divorce. I'm taking Molly. One way or another."

He went up the porch steps, through the entrance, up the stairs. Me back of him. At the top of the stairs he turned and said, "You're asking for it, Angie," and hauled back his arm. I stood, waiting for it. If he hit me, maybe he'd think of me the way he did Molly. But his hand dropped.

He knocked on a door, with a number 3 on it. Inside were footsteps and a woman asked, "Who is it?" Molly.

"You know who," Paddy said.

She laughed. "You want to get messed up again?" She slid a bolt fast on the other side and walked away.

Paddy stepped back and kicked the door. Ordinarily a kick that hard would have gone on through. But this was an old-fashioned house with heavy oak doors. Nothing happened except a big deep scar on the finish.

Paddy kicked again. Then he went crazy. Kept kicking that door like a bronco with a cactus under its saddle, his face a sick-gray and his eyes blazing. I pulled at him. He shook me off and kept kicking. Nobody came out of the apartment across the hall—the folks must have been gone. Downstairs a woman was yelling. The landlady, it turned out, who went back inside and called the police.

Suddenly the cops were there, no sirens or anything, and they were manhandling Paddy. It took the two of them to handcuff him and drag him downstairs. I stood there, frozen. One cop came back, knocked on Molly's door, asked her to open up and tell him what the trouble was. "No trouble of mine," she said through the door. "I didn't call you. Nobody came in my apartment. Just some stupid idiot kicking my door. Go talk to the one who called you."

"It's the police, We need information."

She didn't answer. He turned to me, "You in on this, lady? You trying to get inside, too?"

I shook my head. "I'm his

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wife. I never touched the door. He just wanted to talk to her. She wouldn't talk to him and he got mad. There wasn't any more to it than that, he just lost his temper."

"Some temper the way the door's beat up. You better come down to the station and tell the Chief about it."

"I'm his wife. I've got no complaint. And if I did, you can't make me say anything against Paddy, I'm his wife. I've got no complaint."

"Well, I have!" the landlady yelled behind us. "Breaking up my door, disturbing my tenants, you bet I'll complain, I'll follow you down to the station in my car."

"I'll pay for all the damage," I said. "You tell the Chief that."

The policeman and the landlady left and I sat down on the top stairstep, shaking like a Washoe Zephyr had struck me. After a bit the bolt slid on Molly's door and the door slowly opened.

She saw me. "Oh," she said.

I didn't say anything.

"You're his wife, aren't you?" I nodded.

"Listen, I'll be straight with you. When I first hit this town I bumped into Paddy. In one of the clubs. I was just getting my bearings, had noplace to go or anyone to see. And Paddy—well, he has a way with him. Anyway, I didn't know he was married, so we played around. Then you showed up, talking about breakfast. So I split. But he looked me up after that and said he'd left you. Kept hanging around. But frankly, lady, I run on a different track than Paddy. With bosses, not hired help. So I said bye-bye and he wouldn't listen. So he tried muscling me around." She laughed, high and hard. "Shows how stupid a good-looking guy can be. I was trained by pros, and he's an amateur."

"Paddy never once raised his hand to me."

She looked at me wise, and a little sad. "Maybe it would have worked out better if he had. Honest to God. Women!" She went back inside and closed the door.

I'd been trying to hate her. But I couldn't. I couldn't even hate Paddy. I felt nothing but sick, sitting there in a strange place like a cast-off ragdoll with its stuffing out.

I got up and went outdoors.

Like I said, it was an old-fashioned house turned into apartments. Whoever had changed it had made kind of a thing out of it being old-fashioned. They'd kept the old veranda, shaped like an L, and put up an old-time hanging porch swing around the corner from the

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house front. I felt so done in that I went and rested in the swing.

After a while a car drove up. It was the landlady looking like she'd bit into a chunk of iron. She stomped inside, never saw me. It got dark, but I just kept sitting there.

Maybe I had a hunch what would happen.

Molly came out of the house. She went down the steps to the sidewalk, her hair shimmering under the porch light and her long black dress swirled with embroidery that matched the color of her hair. When she reached the sidewalk, she turned towards town.

I heard footsteps, running from a clump of trees across the street. I stood up, my heart feeling like it filled my whole chest. Molly stopped, tall and defiant, turning towards the man who rushed at her. Paddy. I knew it would be Paddy. She laughed, never a flinch out of her. "Did that poor fool woman bail you out?"

"They didn't hold me. I paid for the door."

"Well, scram! You can't pay for me. The price is too high."

He called her a name. Then pleading like, his hands reaching out almost as if he was trying to climb up some slick and muddy riverbank, "Please, Molly. Please! I'm begging, Molly. I never felt this way before about anybody. I've got to have you, Molly!"

"Go to hell," she said. "I'm no horse you can break. So lay off the big he-man Wild West stuff with me."

Paddy swung. She dodged but the blow glanced her head. She staggered back. He came at her again, both his hands grabbing.

She must have reached in her purse. I couldn't see. I only heard a sharp crack, the sound reverberating in my ears until it made me dizzy. Paddy was on the ground, crawling around like he was trying to find something.

I floated down the steps, no feet, out to the sidewalk. Then Molly was on the pavement and I was pounding her head onto the concrete.

See Paddy out there? Gentlest man in the world. Sweet and quiet, just rocking on the porch. Hums to himself and rocks. Oh, now and again he walks out to the little corral I built and pets the mare I bought after I moved us up here to Wyoming. But Paddy just stays gentle and quiet, that's his real nature. That Molly had no right to stir him up, make fun of him. Then try to kill him. She turned him crazy, her face and her bigtime ways.

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Right after the trial I brought Paddy back to Wyoming.

Yes, the trial scared me. Not so much for myself as for Paddy. Because if I got sent to the penitentiary, who'd look after him? That shot of Molly's addled him. Struck his head. Made him like a child. Sometimes he cries at night, gets on the floor and crawls around. Just like he did that night. Like he's looking for something he'll never find.

Molly didn't die right away. Not for almost two weeks after that night. But that didn't get me off. Manslaughter it was. In the heat of passion. And my lawyer brought out that I was protecting my husband. So they gave me a suspended sentence. On probation for three years. I have to check in every month.

So I rent this little house on Paddy's old home place from the folks who own it now. Family friends. They keep an eye on Paddy while I'm at work. Except for some nights Paddy's happy. Thinks the mare is a whole string of horses, calls her a lot of different names.

Me?

Well, I'm kind of happy, too. Kind of. No more worry about Paddy running off to the clubs. And by now I'm used to it.

Used to what?

Oh, like with the mare, Paddy calls me by a different name. Just one. Molly. So it hurts a little, but I just figure it's me who answers. Me, Angie.

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GERALD KERSH

Gerald Kersh could toss off these "odd" stories with remarkable elan—off-trailers, little curios, strange glimpses of the passing scene. . . This one has never before appeared in an American book or magazine. . .

DO YOU FOLLOW ME?

by GERALD KERSH

A man—do you follow me?—a man, sir, is nothing without a sense of humor. Or a woman either, for that matter. Show me a woman who can see a joke. Do you follow me? A joke is something meant in fun, by way of a jest. And few women if any, sir, have the capacity to see a joke and laugh at a joke—to laugh at a joke, sir, in the spirit in which a man makes that joke. Do you follow me? Do I make myself clear? Now, young Mona is a girl who can take a joke.

Yesterday a young gentleman came into this place and ordered a pint of bitter. He poured out three tablespoonsful of it on the bar—do you follow me?—in a neat round little pool. Then he asked Mona for two hairs out of her head.

She wondered what he was getting at, but curiosity, sir, curiosity in women is overwhelming. She pulled out two of her hairs and gave them to this young gentleman and then watched him. He tied a knot in these two hairs, sir—do you follow me?—and put them in the little pool of bitter; and then he said, "Watch closely."

Mona bent close, and just as she put her head down, this young gentleman gave the little pool of bitter a flick with his finger and splashed it all over her face.

Some women might have made a fuss, but Mona laughed. She laughed because she is a rare woman who has a sense of humor, sir.

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On the other hand, sir, women are incapable of *playing* a good joke.

I didn't tell you, I think, of the joke a young lady tried to play on me the other day in the train, when I was coming back from town. I got the 4:09, sir—do you follow me?—and I was all alone in the compartment with a young lady. A nice young lady with peculiar hair. It was black, and it hung down, sir, like a Red Indian's hair. She was the sort of young lady you could take anywhere—a real lady, sir, in nice clothes, with a furpiece.

She was sitting there—yes, sir, I said the day before yesterday. When I was in town, sir. Yes, Wednesday, of course.

I was sitting in my corner, sir, and I don't mind telling you that I took a bit of a look at this young lady. She was what I would sum up as the Nervous Type. Do you follow me? Shaky, quivery, sir, a bundle of nerves. She was glancing at the early edition of the evening paper, but she seemed to have finished with it—do you follow me?—so I asked her, civilly of course, if she'd mind my having a look at it.

She gave me the paper without a word. I had a copy, sir, in my pocket; but I didn't want to pass up the chance to make a little conversation with this young lady, and perhaps have a laugh or two. I said, "It's a bad spell of weather we're having," and she said, "Yes." Just that.

Then I said, "The situation looks grave in the Middle East," and she said, "Yes," again, just that.

I said nothing more for a minute, just observed her, sir, observed her. Then I said, "I see they hanged Bentley this morning."

"Oh, yes," she says, "they hanged Bentley this morning. By the neck," she says.

"Until he was dead," I says.

"Dead, dead, dead," she says. "There was quite a crowd outside the prison."

"Was there, now?" I says. "Were you there?"

"I was there later," she says. "I heard others say there was quite a crowd."

"Well, now," I says, "fancy that. Can you imagine men and women queueing up to see a man hanged? Not even to see him," I says, "but just to be nearby."

"Don't," she says.

"I see you're a sensitive type, miss, a real bundle of nerves."

"I knew him," she says. "I knew Bentley. They should never have hanged him."

"Why not?" I asks.

"He was innocent," she says.

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I see that she's having a bit of a joke with me, do you follow me? So I says, "Oh? And how do you know he was innocent?"

"I knew him," she says.

"Ah, you knew him," I says. "I daresay you're that Missing Witness everybody wanted to find?"

"That's right," she says. And I roars with laughter—do you follow me? Then I goes serious, and I enters, sir, I enters into the spirit of it. "Miss X," I calls her.

"Yes," she says.

"Or should I say Miss Missing Witness?"

She starts to laugh at that, sir, and goes on laughing for quite a while. Then I says, "Of course, if he'd been innocent you could have saved him."

She says, "Yes, I could have saved him."

"But you couldn't turn up?" I says.

"I couldn't turn up."

"Otherwise engaged, I presume?"

"Nobody would ever believe it," she says.

"Why, miss, believe what?" I asks.

"That I lost my memory," she says. "Bentley was with me that night. He was with me and I could prove it. But shortly afterwards, why—"

She starts to cry. "Why," she says, "I don't know what happened. I only know that I found a newspaper saying that he was to be hanged this morning, so I went to the nearest police station. But you don't believe me?"

"Oh," I says, very serious-like. "I do believe you. But what happened then?"

"They didn't believe me," she says. "They laughed at me. And then I remembered my uncle. My uncle," she says, "would be certain to help me; and he being an influential man they'd be bound to believe him. So I went to find him. And he was in a nursing home, ill. So I came back to London as fast as I could."

"To stop the execution, no doubt," I says.

"I had an idea that a Detective-Inspector at Scotland Yard, a man my father used to know, would help me. But he was on the Continent on another case, and nobody else would listen to me. They offered me tea. They were kind. But. . .Then I remembered one more thing. The landlady—she would remember my face!

"So I got in a taxi and went to the old flat and the landlady did recognize me—and we rushed to Scotland Yard—but it was too late, d'you see? They'd just hanged him. And they couldn't—well, they couldn't

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say they were wrong, so they told me to pull myself together and gave me tea. . .And somehow, I don't quite remember how, I got away—and then soon after, all my memory came rushing back, and I knew something else—something much more important. . ."

"Oh," I says when she paused, "and what was that?"

"He was everything and everybody in the world that I ever loved. And there was another thing I remembered, too. He couldn't have committed that murder. He couldn't have killed that girl. Because I killed that girl! I saw her there in our place—our own place, you see—and I went mad. There was a pair of scissors there, so I killed her. And then I went away—and as I went, everything got foggy and dark and emptyish—and I didn't know any more. . .until I saw the paper. Now—"

And she bursts into tears—do you follow me, sir?—into tears so real-looking they would have deceived a Judge.

I stays serious as long as I can. Then it's got to come out.

"You're the person that killed Charlotte Fingal?" I says.

"I am," she says, "God help me, I am!"

"Oh," I says. "Do you know who I am?"

"No," she says. "Who are you?"

"Why," I says, "I am Symes, the hangman that hanged Bentley."

And believe me or believe me not, sir, she faints dead away, with a scream like a whistle.

I had to get out of there. "Good day, Miss X!" I says, but she doesn't answer, so I leave and the train goes on.

Now there was a woman that could *give* a joke, but not *take* one. The cream of the joke was that I am, as you very well know, none other than Symes the draper, with a shop on this very street. But she believed me, believed I'm the hangman. Laugh? Why, I nearly choked! Let's have another—do you follow me?—one for the road.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Jericho detective story by

HUGH PENTECOST

A twelve-year-old boy, the son of a famous and wealthy movie star, is missing and the parents refuse to notify the police or call in the F.B.I. Does a man like John Jericho, even with all his experience as a hunter of criminals, have the right to act on his own? Without the approval of the parents? Without official sanction? And suppose Jericho's personal intervention should result in the boy's death?. . . It was a decision only a man like Jericho could face. . .

JERICHO AND THE MISSING BOY

by HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho saw the woman come out of the woods and start across the lawn toward his cottage, half running. She stumbled, as though she was close to exhaustion, a runner uncertain of reaching the final tape in a race.

For a moment Jericho's reaction was mixed. He had rented the cottage because he wanted privacy. There were moments in his life when he wanted to be shut away with his creative energies undisturbed. He was standing in front of a half-finished painting on an easel, a large canvas, with brilliant colors reflecting Jericho's enormous energy, and he didn't want any interruptions. The prospect of one made him angry.

He saw the woman fall to her knees, struggle up, and come on again. It was, he told himself, something more than an ordinary emergency. He put down his palette and brushes, took the black curved-stem pipe out of his mouth, slipped the pipe into the pocket of his corduroy jacket, and went out onto the terrace. He was a giant of a man, six feet four inches tall, 240 pounts of solid bone and muscle, with flaming red hair and beard.

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The woman reached him, gasping for breath. She grabbed at his arms to hold herself up. "Thank God you're home," she said.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Redmond?" he asked.

He knew her, knew of her, only casually. She was his nearest neighbor, some 500 yards as the crow might fly through the woods. She was the ex-wife of the famous film star, Anthony Redmond. She was living here in New England with her twelve-year-old son while her ex-husband cut a romantic swath in Hollywood, Europe, or wherever his career took him.

Laura Redmond was an attractive, dark, withdrawn woman. She suggested a special kind of female mystery, Jericho thought, that made her irresistibly interesting to men. At this moment, clinging to him, some sort of fear had ripped away her sophisticated exterior.

"It's Dicky," she said.

Dick was the twelve-year-old boy. One day, a week ago, he had fallen out of a tree at the edge of the woods. He had been spying on the red-bearded giant who had taken over the cottage. It was simple boyish curiosity about a neighbor who chose to stay hidden away from the community.

The boy had been badly jarred by the fall, and Jericho had taken him into the cottage, medicated a cut knee, produced a cold bottle of pop from the refrigerator, and made friends. Eventually he had driven Dick home in his red Mercedes and met Laura Redmond. He had found her pleasant, engaging.

Jericho had been tempted to follow up the meeting—she did things to his maleness. But he had turned his back on it because it would interfere with his concentrating on the six paintings he'd promised to produce for a new one-man show at the Mullins Gallery.

"Dick fall out of another tree?" he asked.

She shook her head and handed him a small piece of paper that she'd carried, crumpled, in her hand. There was a strange scrawled writing on it.

Your son has been kidnaped. You will prepare to pay $1,000,000 or the most you can afford. I will know if it is not enough. You will be told what to do next. Don't call the police or your son will be killed.

Jericho felt Laura Redmond's fingernails bite into his arm. He frowned at the note, a dark anger starting to simmer inside him. We live in a cockeyed world—a world of skyjacking and bombing, of blackmailing by power groups that

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are, laughably, considered legal. We accept this as a part of the seamier side of living. Using helpless children to pry money out of people is the lowest of all these holdups.

"Take it easy," Jericho said. "You've called the police?"

She raised wide violet eyes to him, eyes filled with terror. "Of course not. It says—"

"I know what it says." Jericho scowled at the paper. "It always says not to call the police. It's a decision you have to make—if this is for real."

"What do you mean, if it's for real? Dicky's gone."

"Tell me about it."

"I went into town to shop," she said. "Dicky stayed at home, playing in the back yard. He's twelve. There's no reason not to leave him alone any more."

"'Any more'?"

"There was a time when I thought Tony—my ex-husband—might try to take Dicky away from me. But he's lost interest in Dicky."

"So you left Dicky alone in the yard."

"He has a tent at the back of the house. He was playing there when I left."

Jericho gestured with the note. "Where did you find this?"

"When I came back from marketing, Dicky wasn't there. He always comes running—to welcome me back, to help with packages. So I called to him, without getting any answer. Then I went to his tent and found—found that note thumbtacked to the tent pole where I couldn't miss it. I tried to call Mark Taylor, my lawyer, but he's out of town for the day. I didn't believe the note, I tried to tell myself it was some kind of joke. I don't have that kind of money."

"But your husband does."

"My ex-husband. Yes, Tony could raise that kind of money if he had to. If he wanted to." She was struggling to get control of herself. "Then I wondered if you might have seen Dicky—if possibly he'd come over here. He took a great liking to you, Mr. Jericho. I—"

"He hasn't been here," Jericho said.

Jericho drove Laura Redmond back to her house in his car. On the way he tried to put the facts of life in front of her. The F.B.I. were experts in kidnaping cases. It was his advice that she get in touch with them at once. There was no guarantee that Dick would be returned unharmed if she didn't. The boy's best chance was to have skilled professionals looking for him.

Anguished, she protested

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that she couldn't. She'd have to reach the boy's father first. If she made the wrong decision Tony would blame her.

"So reach him. I'll talk to him," Jericho said.

"God knows where he is," she cried out.

"He has an agent, doesn't he—someone who handles his affairs? The agent will know where to find him."

"I've left word for Mark to call," she said. She was desperate in her uncertainty.

"Your lawyer?" he asked, sensing that perhaps this lawyer was more to Laura than a legal adviser.

The Redmond house was an old remodeled Colonial on a side street of the village. There was a pleasant stretch of front lawn, a small well-cared-for flower garden, two old shade trees. Laura went directly into the house to try to reach her husband's agent on the telephone.

Jericho wandered around to the rear. There he saw the boy's small green canvas tent. He hesitated a moment. He didn't want to destroy any evidence of the kidnapers—footprints, for example. He walked down the edge of a flowerbed and then cut in, an indirect approach not likely to have been taken by anyone in a hurry.

He had to bend almost double to get into the tent. There was nothing much to see. Along one edge was a collection of wilted pine branches. It might have been the basis for a bed, he thought, but there were no blankets and no sleeping bag. There was a Sears catalogue on the ground beside the pine boughs, a Boy Scout hat hanging from a nail in the tent pole, and a detective-story magazine.

He heard a door slam in the house and he backed out of the tent. Laura was coming toward him from the house. She had been lucky. Anthony Redmond was filming in Hollywood. His agent would get to him as quickly as possible and she could expect a call.

"You can also expect a call from the kidnapers with instructions," Jericho said. "If you'd notify the F.B.I. now, they could bug your phone and trace the call."

"I can't," she said. "Not till I've talked to Tony." Tears were streaming down her face. "Oh, my God, what will they do to him?"

"They may take good care of him if you and your husband meet their demands," Jericho said reassuringly. "Tell me, were there any blankets on those pine boughs in the tent?"

"A sleeping bag," she said. "Isn't it there? I didn't notice."

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"They evidently took it," Jericho said. He looked out to the woods in back of the house. The absence of the sleeping bag suggested the boy was being held somewhere outdoors, perhaps not too far away. Anger burned at the center of his gut. The boy might be close by, but an open search of the woods could result in violence.

"I don't know what I can do for you, Laura," he said. "If you won't call the F.B.I.—"

She reached out to him. "Please, please don't leave me," she said. "At least until Mark comes. Tony will be calling and there may be things to do. The kidnapers may get in touch. Please don't leave me."

"All right," he said. "You may not be giving Dick his best chance. But I'll stay."

They waited in the house for whatever might happen next. Doing nothing in crisis was almost more than Jericho could stand. She offered him some bourbon and he accepted. They sat in the living room, waiting for word from the kidnapers, waiting for Anthony Redmond's call, waiting for Mark Taylor to appear. From time to time Jericho wandered to a rear window and looked out at the woods. The house could be watched without their being aware of it.

Laura felt compelled to talk. It was the only way for her to stay sane. She talked about her husband, perhaps because his phone call was imminent. She had loved him, he had been her whole life. She had grown up in this village, had met him here when he was on location for a film. He had been romantic, glamorous, had swept her off her feet. Her friends, including Mark Taylor, her boy friend since high school, had warned her it would never work. Anthony Redmond belonged to another world, an unreal world. He would never tie himself down to one woman.

But the marriage, at the start, had been good beyond her dreams. Dicky had been born in the second year. Anthony had been so proud and had loved the baby with a passion. Dicky would tie them together forever, she thought.

When Dicky was less than a year old, Anthony had gone to Spain to make a film. It would only be for two months or so. Things started to fall apart then. There was a famous Italian actress, a great beauty. The gossip about her and Anthony was true; he admitted it when he came home. He begged for her forgiveness. Away from Laura the temptation had been too great.

She forgave him, but it was

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only the beginning of the end. It was never the same again. There'd been one woman after another. So she had sued for divorce and come back here to live with Dicky. It had been relatively amicable. No trouble over money. For a while he kept in touch with his small son, came to visit him. But finally the separation was total. It had been nearly two years since there'd been any contact with Redmond, except for the monthly check which came from his agent.

The phone rang.

It was Redmond calling from Hollywood. Laura told him what had happened. She read him the note. Jericho could hear the voice on the other end, shouting.

"Tony, please—" she pleaded. "I've been advised to call in the F.B.I.—a neighbor, the only person who knows. He's here now. Please, will you talk to him?" She held out the phone to Jericho.

Jericho took the phone. "Mr. Redmond? I'm John Jericho."

"I don't care who the hell you are," the familiar harsh voice said. "The new Bogart" they called him. "Put Laura back on."

"I've had some experience with crime, Redmond," Jericho said. "I think you people should call in the F.B.I. If you try to handle it yourselves you may not get the boy back."

"You listen, man," Redmond said. "They say no police, so that's the way we'll work it. So help me, if you try to muscle in, whoever you are—"

"I'm not going to muscle in."

"Good. I'm flying East. I'll have money the first thing the banks open in the morning in New York. Take me two hours after that to drive up there. Let's say eleven thirty tomorrow morning. If the kidnapers get in touch, explain we can't have the money before then. Now put Laura on again."

Laura talked to him again—rather, she listened to him again. Finally she came back from the phone. "He cares for Dicky," she said in an odd voice. "I think he really cares for him."

"He's his father."

"I—I think he'd forgotten that," Laura said.

The day wore on, summer hot. There was no word from anyone. The village went about its business, unaware of anything out of the ordinary. Jericho felt his nerves getting frayed. To begin with he'd run out of pipe tobacco. Conversation with Laura Redmond had

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dried up. There was nothing to talk about except the central situation, and they'd gone round it and round it, discussing it from every angle, unable to move in any way until instructions came from the kidnapers.

Why didn't they call? Or send a message? They'd know, Jericho explained, that the kind of money they were asking for must come from Anthony Redmond. They'd know the actor was in California. They'd know it would take at least 24 hours for him to raise the cash and come East. They wouldn't give instructions too far in advance.

While they waited and worried, Jericho couldn't shake the certainty that they were being watched. Time and again he went to the rear windows that looked out on the woods, convinced that sooner or later he would see some movement—some movement of brush on a windless day, some reflection of the afternoon sun against something bright, something that didn't belong there. But there was nothing.

Shortly after five o'clock on the longest afternoon that Jericho could remember, a car drove into the front yard and an attractive-looking man—in his mid-thirties, Jericho guessed—got out and came running up the path to the front door. He didn't knock or ring, but came straight in.

"Laura!" he called out.

She ran to him and was, for a moment, in his arms.

"Darling, I found your message at the office," the man said. "What's wrong?"

She handed him the crumpled note without speaking.

"My God!" he said. Then he became aware of Jericho in a far corner of the room.

"This is John Jericho, Mark, who's taken the Bentley cottage," Laura said. "I went there looking for Dicky. Mr. Jericho's stayed with me. I couldn't find you. I—I—" She started to crack.

Taylor kept his arm around her protectingly. He had candid gray eyes and a wide generous mouth. "I'm grateful to you for standing by, Jericho," he said.

"What else?" Jericho said.

A startled look changed Taylor's face. "My God, I almost forgot this. It was shoved through the mail chute in my office door. For you, Laura." He took an envelope out of his pocket. "It could be—"

It was—instructions from the kidnapers.

We know your husband can't get money to us before tomorrow. $250,000 in tens and twenties, all unmarked bills. You will deliver the money at noon tomorrow, you or your

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husband. No one else. We will know if you have called police or the F.B.I. Leave the money in the office of the old mill. Don't muff it if you want your kid to live. There will be no second chance.

Mark Taylor muttered a string of profanities under his breath.

"Written by a different person," Jericho said, frowning at the note. "Different writing."

"Will Anthony make it by noon tomorrow?" Taylor asked.

"He should," Laura said. "Just make it."

"Where is this old mill they mention?" Jericho asked.

"About a mile from here through the woods," Taylor said. "It's an old sawmill, long abandoned."

"You realize the F.B.I. could surround the woods, move in," Jericho said.

"Not without being seen," Taylor said. "They'd be watching. They might carry out their threat against Dick."

"Please, Mr. Jericho, let Tony pay the money," Laura said. "Let them take it and go. Surely they'll set Dicky free if we do exactly what they tell us."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "It's your ball game," he said. "Now that you're not alone, Mrs. Redmond, I'll go back to my place if you don't mind. There won't be any action until tomorrow morning."

"I'm so grateful to you," she said. "So very grateful."

"I wish there was some positive help I could give," he said.

Jericho drove out of Laura Redmond's yard convinced that eyes were peering at the back of his head from the woods. The drop-off for the money, the whole operation, was so close by.

He got back to his cottage and like a starving man went to the jar of his specially blended pipe tobacco and filled both his pipe and his pouch. Sitting on the terrace, a cloud of blue smoke around his head, a bourbon in his hand, he stared at the woods.

It was tough for Laura, and for the absent ex-husband flying across the continent, hoping, maybe praying. It was tough for Mark Taylor, the loyal friend, still obviously in love with Laura. But it was ten times tougher for the twelve-year-old boy snatched away from everything that represented safety and security, waiting under the gun for his parents to deliver, wondering if his captors would live up to their end of the bargain and set him free. It must be agony for the boy to know that if he

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could run only a few hundred yards his mother might be able to hear his screams for help.

Twilight settled over the cottage and the summer night was close. Jericho sat on his terrace, drinking and smoking and battling with himself. Over his second slug of bourbon he had developed a theory about the kidnaping. If he was right Dick Redmond was never going to turn up alive—unless Jericho acted on his theory.

Did he have the right to act? Did he have the right to interfere? Suppose he went back to Laura and Mark Taylor and told them his theory and what he believed should be done, and suppose they said "No!" Dick's one chance might be gone. If he went ahead with his plan in spite of the "No" and botched it, they and the whole world would blame him for Dick's death. Stay out of it, he told himself. Mind your own business.

He remembered Dick's young face, the bright inquisitive eyes, the warm eager smile. Just as sure as the coming day the boy would be dead shortly after noon tomorrow if Jericho was right about the situation. Still, he had no business to assume the responsibility, to act on his own.

Darkness closed down over the cottage as clouds blotted out the moon and the stars. Only the red glow from Jericho's pipe and the occasional flicker of a firefly punctuated the black stillness. Down the road a woman waited and prayed. Somewhere in the woods a small boy fought with terror. Or did he? Had the time not yet come for him to be afraid?

Sometime later Jericho got up from his chair, went into the cottage, and switched on lights. He had made his decision. He was going to take it on himself, without consultation, without permission. It was the boy's only chance. He'd finally convinced himself of that.

He changed out of the clothes he was wearing into a black knit turtleneck shirt, charcoal-gray slacks, and a navy-blue cardigan. He stuffed his pipe, pouch, and lighter into the pockets of the sweater; he filled a silver pint flask with bourbon and slid it into his hip pocket. In the kitchen he made himself two thick ham and cheese sandwiches which he wrapped in foil. Ten minutes later he was walking down the main highway, his cottage and his car left behind him.

An old sawmill about a mile up in the woods, Taylor had said. If sometime in the past they had carted or trucked lumber out of the woods there

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must be the remnants of a trail or road somewhere. It was a long time before he found it. He had walked by it several times, the roadside brush having completely overgrown the mouth of it.

He swore softly as he moved up the trail. The clouds were beginning to drift away. Not too long from now the whole countryside would be bathed in moonlight.

Just ahead the old buildings of the mill loomed up. Jericho was an experienced woodsman and he walked as noiselessly as an Indian. He was looking up at the ancient trees that surrounded the mill. He selected one, waited for a moment, listening, and then he climbed—up to the third sprouting of branches, 30 feet above the ground. He wedged himself into a crotch, his back against the trunk of the tree. He waited. Suddenly the woods were bathed in the bright light of the moon, but Jericho was now out of sight, high in the tree.

Hour after hour went by and finally morning came. Jericho had eaten his sandwiches, the foil was stuffed in the pocket of his sweater. His flask was half empty. From time to time, almost automatically, his hand reached for his pipe and pouch. Each time he checked himself. Every bone and muscle in his body ached. He moved, an inch or two at a time, to change his position slightly.

With daylight he looked down on the dilapidated buildings that had been the old mill. The roof had caved in in places; moss grew on the weather-stained walls still standing. Out of view but within hearing was a stream racing down a rocky bed—water that had once turned the mill wheel that had worked the power saws.

The sun rose. Jericho glanced at his watch. Anthony Redmond, in New York, would have collected the money by now and be racing up the Thruway, sweating with anxiety. He'd probably phoned Laura and got from her the details of the kidnapers' demand—$250,000 in unmarked tens and twenties. He knew he had to make it by noon. Time would be going by for him with terrifying speed. For the man in the tree it dragged painfully.

At last the sun was high in the sky. Jericho, looking at his watch, saw that it was ten minutes to noon. Then he heard the noise of someone coming, making no effort to hide his arrival.

Jericho peered down through the leaves at the old logging road and saw Anthony Redmond hurrying toward the mill, carrying a small black

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suitcase. There was something dramatic about the man, even alone here in the woods.

Redmond made straight for the crumbling building and went inside. He evidently knew where the office was in the old mill. Moments later he came out, stood looking almost desperately around, then started down the trail without once looking back.

Jericho moved, ever so slightly, and then saw the boy coming. He was coming from higher up on the wooded hill, almost running toward the crumbling mill. Jericho fought the sudden impulse to cry out to Dick, to jump down from his perch in the tree, to take the boy in his arms. He was helped by something he saw, something he'd looked for all yesterday afternoon—the glint of sunlight on a rifle barrel about 40 yards up the hill behind the boy.

Dick went into the mill and came out with the suitcase that his father had left. He looked happy! He went up the hill with the bag and a man rose up out of the brush to join him, a rifle tucked under his arm. The two disappeared beyond a rise in the ground.

Jericho came down from the tree, groaning slightly. He was so stiff he could scarcely move at first. But he started after the boy and the man, moving, presently, swift and quiet. Not far over the rise of ground he saw a small cabin, and Dick and the man were just going into it.

Jericho moved down the slope toward the cabin. Eventually, almost on his hands and knees, he reached a window at the back of the cabin and slowly raised himself.

There were three young men in the cabin with Dick Redmond.

"I told you it would work," the man with the rifle said. He was standing with his back to Jericho.

"Let's have a look at it, man," one of the others said. "I never see so much money all in one place at the same time."

Dick had put the suitcase on the table and now he opened it, revealing the money stacked in neat packages.

"It's all there," the third one said. "Brother!"

"Papa came all by himself," the man with the gun said. "So let's not drag our feet."

"He did come, didn't he!" Dick said, beaming.

"Just like you hoped he would, Dick," the man with the gun said. He moved slightly. "I'm sorry to have to do this to you, Dick, but, man, you could draw pictures of all of us, you know."

The boy's face was screwed

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up in total bewilderment. "I told you I don't care about the money, Frank. I—I don't understand."

"It won't hurt, Dick," Frank said. "You won't ever know what hit you. I'm sorry but we can't let you go free."

"Get it over with, Frank!"

A black figure hurtled through the window. The rifle went off, but the bullet hit the ceiling as Jericho's arm went around the rifleman's neck and snapped his head back. Jericho scrambled for the gun and swung it around.

One of the other men had tugged a revolver out of his belt and Jericho fired. A gaping hole appeared in the man's shirt front as he jackknifed forward and went down. The third man's hands were up and he was screaming for mercy.

"All right, Dick," Jericho said. "Get out of here—fast. Your mother and father are waiting for you. Tell them what happened here and have them send the State Police."

The boy, white as a sheet, stared at the two fallen men. "They—they were going to kill me! I thought they were my friends, but they were going to kill me!"

"They certainly were, Dick. Get moving."

Talking to Anthony Redmond proved to be an odd experience. Jericho had seen him so often in films that he seemed like an old friend—his voice, his mannerisms, his tight little one-cornered smile, all so familiar. And yet the man was a stranger, his nerves tense, Jericho unknown to him. He had come directly to the State Police Barracks where Jericho had finished dictating a statement for the Lieutenant in command.

The three men the police had found in the cabin with Jericho, one of them critical from a gunshot wound in his chest, were wanted for the wanton murder of an entire family in the next state. There had been a ten-state alarm out for them. Kidnaping only added to the long list of charges against them.

"I don't quite know how to thank you," Redmond said. "From what Dick told us they were about to—to rub him out when you broke it up." He turned pale.

Jericho smiled. "Seen you do it a dozen times in films," he said.

"But this was for real," Redmond said. "I know you helped Laura in the afternoon, that you were aware of all the facts we had, so you weren't just up in the woods for exercise."

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Jericho stuffed a fresh fill of tobacco into his black pipe and held his lighter to it. "It was a risk," he said. "If I was wrong, if I blew it, there'd have been no life left for me. But I was so damned sure!"

"Of what?"

"In the beginning, when I first went to Mrs. Redmond's house with her, I found myself toying with the idea that there'd been no kidnaping," Jericho said.

"But Dick was gone! The note!"

"It was the note that bothered me. 'Prepare to pay one million dollars or the most you can afford. I will know if it is not enough.' It didn't sound like a hardened professional. It sounded like a kid. Dick's sleeping bag was missing from the tent. I tried to visualize a criminal whose success depended on his getting away with the boy quickly stopping to take along a sleeping bag. I thought to myself that this was some kind of prank of the boy's. He'd gone off by himself, taking the bag to make sure he'd be warm at night, leaving that rather absurd note for his mother."

"Of course if you'd known Dick—"

"I did know him." Jericho smiled faintly. "I met him while he was working for the C.I.A., spying on me in my cottage. Unfortunately for the master spy he fell out of a tree. I couldn't risk my first theory, Redmond, but it stayed with me most of yesterday afternoon. It was re-enforced by things your wife told me. You had loved the boy and he loved you, but you'd been out of touch for two years. I could imagine that active little mind asking, 'Does he still love me? Would he help me if I was in trouble?' So, I told myself, he was trying to find out. A kidnaping—'pay one million dollars or the most you can afford.' He desperately needed you to come through for him."

"My God, I can see how you imagined that," Redmond said. "But of course—"

"Of course that's exactly what happened," Jericho said. "There was no kidnaping—in the beginning. It was all Dick's doing. He went off into the woods with his sleeping bag and waited to see if you would come through for him."

"But these men!" Redmond said, his voice unsteady.

"The second note made me certain of them," Jericho said. "Different writing. Specific instructions. A specific amount demanded. Exact instructions as to place and time for the payoff. Another hand, another kind of mind had come into the picture. I could imagine what

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had happened. Dick had run into strangers in the woods, dangerous strangers. They had demanded to know what he was doing there. Ingenuously he told them. He was letting his family think he'd been kidnaped. He wanted—I can't guess his exact words—to find out if his father still cared for him. And who was his father? The rich famous actor, Anthony Redmond.

"These men were running for their lives; they needed money the way they needed air to breathe. What a godsend this kid was! They played along with him. They'd help him carry out his plan. They let him see you bring the money. They actually let him collect it for them. But then—then he had to die."

"And you were there—but how did you happen to be there at exactly the right moment?"

"They would be watching in the daytime," Jericho said. "There might be a search party; the family might ignore the warning and call in the F.B.I. *But they couldn't watch at night.* So I went up there in the dark and I took a leaf from Dick's spy manual and climbed a tree." He stretched a little painfully. "I may never be the same. Thirteen hours up a tree! But I was there when they showed. I was sure they would come, and they did. I knew I would have to be there at the exact moment or it would be all up with Dick."

"What can I do to express my gratitude?" Redmond asked.

Jericho's pale-blue eyes fastened on the actor's face. "Reassure the boy—if you really do care for him. He needs it—how badly I leave you to judge."

"Will you come back to the house with me? Laura and Dick will want to thank you."

"Not today," Jericho said. "I need to sleep around the clock, and I'm behind in my work." He reached out a huge hand to the actor's shoulder. "I hope it works out for you, friend."

"Q"

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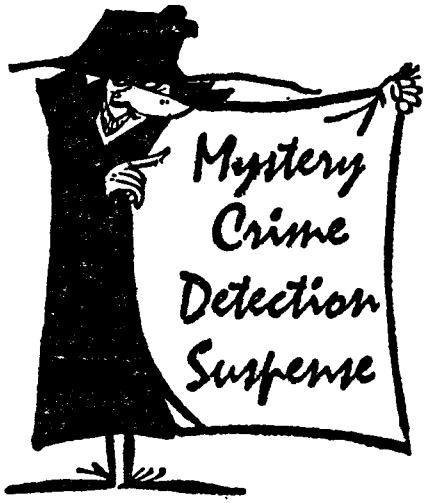

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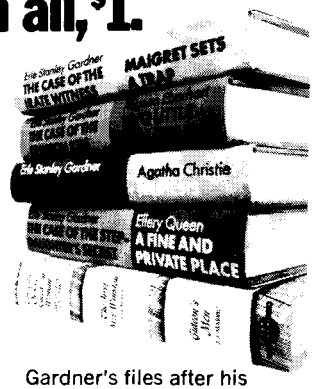

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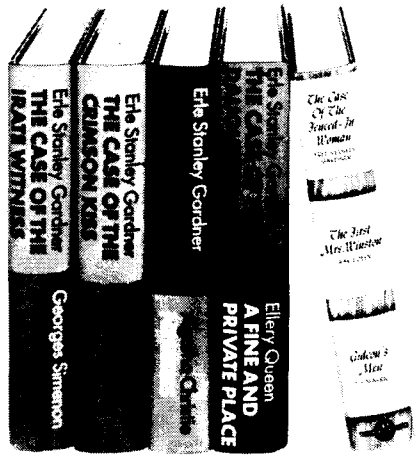

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